

Peter's Progress.





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Peter's Progress

BY

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PETER'S PROGRESS.

CHAPTER I.

“Life parti-coloured, half pleasure, half care.”

“G-RRR! The malice, oh, the malice of inanimate matter!” exclaimed Peter Dare angrily as he leant down to retrieve a recalcitrant collar-stud that had taken up a strong position under the chest-of-drawers.

He was the senior subaltern of the Westshire Regiment, stationed at Ghazipur in the Punjab, this tall, good-looking boy who was railing so comprehensively at things in general, and in particular at that majestic force which rules the universe—compelling alike constellations and collar-studs—the inexorable Law of Gravitation.

Frightfully late for dinner he was; there was not the slightest doubt about that! It was entirely his own fault, too, for he had lingered very much longer than he ought to have done at the club, talking to Mrs Curtis, the judge's wife.

“By Jove, she is pretty,” he said half aloud to himself with enthusiasm, recalling for a moment the vision

of the fascinating little lady's pale, sensitive face, and her slow, sweet smile: "Just as delicate and fragile as porcelain, with such a pathetic look, too, in her big brown eyes, and the daintiest hands and feet in the world!"

Until to-day he had scarcely had more than a bowing acquaintance with her. He had called, of course, at the beginning of the cold weather when she had first come out to Ghazipur; but somehow since then he had never once had an opportunity of speaking to her.

Often enough, from afar, he had admired her as she sat slim and graceful in her enormous car, either watching the polo or flying along the roads in a whirlwind of dust, but she seemed always to have some one in attendance—when it wasn't Major Anstruther of his own regiment, it was sure to be some other ardent admirer. There appeared literally to be no end to her supply of devoted cavaliers, all eagerly vying with one another for the coveted honour of being her escort; so eventually he had abandoned the hope of ever becoming friends with her at all. But to-day, at polo, she had sent away Anstruther and the rest, and had singled him out for special notice, and naturally he had felt not a little flattered by the attention.

His regiment had been playing a match against the cavalry, and he had been lucky enough to hit the only goals that had been scored, and altogether to play 'a bit above his form'—as he would have put it. And after the match she had come and congratulated him, and told him that he had played 'splendidly,' and that she had never, never seen such dear ponies, and might she give them some sugar.

And then she had carried him off for a run in her

car, and later in the evening, had stayed talking to him at the club for ever so long—much to the annoyance of Major Anstruther, and of many another would-be worshipper.

“By Jove, it can’t be five minutes to eight,” he said, suddenly looking at his watch. “It *is* though, and I’m engaged to dine at the Commissioner’s at eight. . . . Or was it eight-fifteen?” he asked himself, rendered, for a moment, hopefully doubtful by this happy thought. “Of course, the invitation is nowhere to be found, I suppose. . . . ‘The malice of inanimate matter’ again! N-no . . . it was eight, sure enough,” he decided on reflection. “Over a mile to the house, too, and it will be five minutes at least before I’m ready to start. Well, I must be late, then—there’s no help for it!”

Having arrived at this pre-eminently philosophic conclusion, he went on with his dressing.

Distinctly good to look at was Peter Dare, so fresh, and clean, and fit; indisputably a fine specimen of young English manhood at its best—of what, in more ornate times, would have been called ‘the flower of Britain’s chivalry.’

He was dark, and his brown hair, though cropped very close, still obstinately showed a little crisp wave—that ‘kink’ so dear to lady novelists. This tendency on the part of his hair he looked upon as little short of a calamity. Ever since his first term at Winchester, when some boy’s misguided female relative had asked—in front of all the ‘men’ in his form, too—“Who is that dear little boy with ripply hair?” he had been unutterably ashamed of his curls; and always maintained, in his absurdly exaggerated fashion, that they had cast a gloom over the whole of his ‘young life.’

This splendid, healthy young animal, after his hard game of polo, was now preparing to enjoy his dinner with a healthy young animal's appetite. Not that the animal, by any means, predominated in Peter Dare; his deep-set, dark eyes, finely cut features, and well-shaped head, proclaimed that fact aloud. Ears and nostrils were almost womanish in their delicacy, but a good square jaw redeemed the face from any charge of effeminacy. In height he was well over six feet, with a graceful rather than a powerful figure; long legs and arms, lean flanks, strong brown hands, and the Apollo Belvidere's own slender ankles and feet.

With what fine British schoolboy scorn would he have listened to such a catalogue of his perfections! He would possibly have allowed that he had a good long reach—a useful thing at polo and racquets—and he fancied he had 'rather a good leg' for a boot; but as for the rest of the description, *that* he would have characterised as 'abject rot.'

Having achieved a fairly creditable bow, he made one last dab with the ivory-backed brushes at his 'rippy' hair, then hurriedly got himself into the snowiest of white waistcoats and a long-tailed black coat, ran across the room, jumping over his small camp-bed on the way, and shouting instructions to his servant to call him at six, sprang into his cart, and was whirled away to the Commissioner's.

It was already past eight; but Peggy, his old mare, one of the fastest trotters in the Punjab, would cover the distance in no time. Besides, Mrs Cumberledge, the Commissioner's wife, with whom he was something of a favourite, would forgive him, he felt sure.

He was to see Phillis, too . . . he had forgotten that

. . . little Phillis Montague, his old playmate. What a jolly kid she used to be! He had never, since he said good-bye to Phil, met anybody one-half as sweet, and 'cute, and jolly. How she had cried at Southampton when she came to see him off to the war; and how red her poor little nose had got; and what a rage old Cousin Sarah had been in because the poor child would cling to him, and kiss him good-bye.

Dear little kiddie; in the old days at home he had always been elder brother to her, and had alternately bullied and spoilt, and teased and petted her, just as a real brother might have done.

How he had missed her, at first! But how soon new places, new friendships, new duties, and new interests had crowded her out of his life. Poor old Cousin Sarah! she was dead now; and latterly Phillis, he heard, had been living—for about the first time in her life, poor child—with her neglectful parents. *They* were his cousins, too, but pretty distant ones—second or third, or once removed, or something. He and Phillis, though, had always had a connecting link in old Cousin Sarah, who had been first cousin to both. A very smart-looking couple, Phil's parents, he remembered. Wrapped up in one another, too. But always abroad somewhere or other, and not particularly keen, apparently, on having their daughter with them.

She must be nearly twenty, now, he thought. . . . It was more than five years since that affecting scene at Southampton. What a lot had happened in the time.

"Ah! here's the house, at last," he ejaculated, as, in the ill-lighted road, he espied the glare of a lantern that illuminated the wide, gateless entrance to the drive.

"Careful, Peggy, old girl, we were nearly into that pillar. Lord!" he exclaimed, a few minutes later, when he saw the deserted drawing-room in which the lights had been turned down, "Blest if they haven't all gone in to dinner. I must hurry up and make my peace." The dinner-party was a large one—thirty people at least. And as he entered the room, it seemed to him that all the thirty were trying to talk at the very tops of their voices, at the same moment.

Under cover of the din caused thereby, he made his way, with a calm, unruffled air, to where his hostess was sitting; and in his best manner, begged her to forgive him for being so abominably late.

Owing to the fact that she was very deaf, the good lady heard nothing of his apology, and took it for granted that he was one of the native servants who wanted to hand her something. It was not, therefore, until she turned round in order to see why, in response to the emphatic shaking of her head, the man did not go away, that she realised who Peter was and what he was trying to do.

The fact that she had taken him for a native struck the dear old soul as so funny, that, with the most beaming^{*} of smiles, and the most gurgling of fat laughs, she readily accorded him her forgiveness, at the same time saying to him—

"You are a disgrace, and don't deserve any dinner at all. There's your empty seat opposite, and some one to sit next to whom you haven't seen for a very long time, and who will scold you well, I hope, for not being here in time to take her in—you bad boy!"

Laughing gaily at her rebuke, he went round to the other side of the table, and slipped quietly into the

empty chair she had indicated. Seated next to him he discovered a radiant and smiling vision whose first words, much to his mortification, made the boyish blood fly to his cheeks.

"Oh, Peterkin, how grand and beautiful you look! Aren't you even going to say how-do-you-do to me?"

"Phil!" he stammered. "Can it be you?"

But for her use of the old, half-forgotten schoolroom name of Peterkin he would have found it impossible to believe that the blue-eyed goddess beside him was little Phillis Montague.

"Are you real, I wonder?" he asked, gazing in astonishment at this masterpiece of Mother Nature's cunning art; this finished picture miraculously completed from what had been the veriest first rough sketch of budding womanhood that he remembered five long years before. "If you weren't so dreadfully grown-up, I would pinch you and find out. . . . Ah, when you look at me like that, I can see that you are the same Phillis who used to fly into such passions with me in the old days. What an age it is since we were together. Five whole years, isn't it? . . . Seems more like a hundred. Dear Phil, it ~~is~~ good to see you again!" and he gave her hand a little squeeze under cover of the table.

"Oh, Peter, I am so glad you are pleased to see me," she said happily, returning the pressure with interest. "Really, after the way you've neglected me of late, hardly ever writing, I thought you must have forgotten my very existence."

"Nonsense, Phil," he retorted hastily, adding, "We'll have lovely times together now anyway. I suppose

you are still mad keen on horses and riding, and all that sort of thing, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," she replied excitedly. "And father gave me a new saddle to bring out, and such a habit, Peter—fits . . ." and she raised both her hands and turned up her eyes to the ceiling with an expression of ecstasy—"fits to perfection! I spent a whole fortnight in London having it tried on nearly every day."

"Vain as ever, I suppose. Well, now, I must own you have some reason. I think you look perfectly magnificent . . . like a goddess . . . or a nymph . . . or . . ."

"Or what, Peter? . . . a mermaid?" she asked, laughing, not a little embarrassed by his outspoken admiration.

"No, silly," he replied, in the most brotherly manner. "I mean something splendid and shining and thoroughbred-looking. Talking of thoroughbreds," he went on with enthusiasm, "I've got a little mare——"

"Peter!" she cried, her great eyes flashing with indignation. "You think I'm like a horse!"

"Nonsense, Phil, I think you're lovely," he returned placidly. "I suppose all these asses will be wanting to marry you."

"Do you think they would be asses to want to?" she inquired demurely.

"No, indeed. But they are none of them nearly good enough for you. There's not one of them fit to black your boots."

"I see you have learnt to be a flatterer. And, oh, Peter," she continued, with a reproachful shake of her pretty head, "I've been hearing all sorts of things about you . . . dreadful tales of gambling and extravagance. I hope they're not true. Now, you're cross, I suppose,"

as he showed signs of restlessness. "I'm sorry. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything, but I'm not going to let you get into mischief without trying my best to prevent it. How many scrapes, I should like to know, did I keep you out of—or rather pull you out of—in the old days at Croyston, you ungrateful boy!"

"No, I'm not ungrateful, Phil, only . . ."

"Only you think it awful cheek my taking you to task directly I get hold of you again. It's no good, Peter," she went on coaxingly, "you'll have to give in, and confess all your crimes. Don't you remember how you never used to get any peace until you had told me all your troubles and difficulties? Now then—confession is good for the soul—what have you been doing?"

"Nothing, Phil, really," he replied rather ruefully.

During all this harangue, he had been busily crumbling his bread, looking a little uncomfortable.

"Then what is all this about debts?" she persisted.

"Oh, every one has debts in India . . . more or less."

"And gambling?"

"No, I'm not a gambler, Phil . . . not really a gambler. I don't care enough about it. . . . Seems to me such a rotten way of getting through money. As a matter of fact, though, I have been losing rather a lot at cards lately. And I can't afford to, now—now that my old uncle's gone and got married. That's what's really put me in the cart. What on earth an old man like that can want . . . But there, I suppose he can do as he likes. Anyway," with the unconquerable optimism of youth, "I'm going to win the big race here, at the January Meeting, and then I shall be as right as rain."

There—now I've confessed. Will you give me absolution?"

"I don't know yet," she said, with a charmingly judicial air; "there is a lot more I must hear about first. They tell me you live like a millionaire. How many ponies has your Majesty got, I should like to know?" Having several more than he could by any means afford, Peter hastened to defend himself by saying—

"Don't be horrid, Phil. I'm jolly careful really."

"Oh, yes, I know you of old, Master Peter—the best of everything was always only *just* good enough for you!" Then, seeing that he was knitting his brows again, she added quickly, "Peter, you are *not* to be cross with me. How *can* you, the first time you've seen me, after all these years?"

"Well, you're being rather trying, you know, Phil. Let's talk about something else, shall we? Your own doings, for instance. That'll be far more interesting than discussing all the Station gossip about me." In spite of his curt tone, or perhaps because of it, there being so much in his manner that recalled the Peter of her childhood, Phillis's heart warmed towards him.

"Very well," she said gladly. "But don't think you have escaped altogether. I see you have got completely out of hand, and that I shall have no easy task in making you good and amenable once more. What! frowning again? There . . . I won't tease you any more, I promise. Now, then, about myself. . . . After old Cousin Sarah died, father and mother had me to live with them in Florence. Poor things, they were very kind to me, in their way, and tried so hard to be good and dutiful; but they are still just like a honeymoon couple, you know, and a grown-up daughter

was a dreadful embarrassment to them. I believe they always spoke of me to one another privately as the 'Incubus!' And although I did my best not to be more in the way than I could help, and spent hours and hours and hours of every day at my music, going in for it 'body and soul and toe-nails,' as they say in Italy—really seriously, you know, Peter—still they could scarcely conceal their relief when mother's old friend, Mrs Cumberledge, asked me to come out to India for the winter, and packed me off just as soon as ever they could. There, that's the history of my life—the short and simple annals of the poor! How patient you've been. And now, I *must* speak to the man on my other side for a little. It is only polite, isn't it? And you must do your duty too."

She turned as she spoke to the occupant of the chair on her right, a stout man whose plethoric countenance, not unlike that of a resolute pig, seemed capable of expressing very little beyond his genuine appreciation of the unimpeachable quality of the dinner.

Glowing with obese satisfaction at the superlative excellence of the last dish, he launched forth, for the benefit of pretty Miss Montague, on the subject of food and cooking, sauces and salmis, till the poor girl felt quite ill. However, she nerved herself heroically to bear, with a good grace, the infliction, as long as politeness demanded. Fortunately for her, the arrival of the next course brought relief by diverting the attention of the eloquent bon-vivant; and she turned once more to her old playmate.

"For Heaven's sake, don't do any more 'duty,'" was his greeting. "I've been as dull as dull."

"You deserved it," she replied, "for being so cross

to me just now. Promise, Peter, that you won't ever be horrid to me again."

"All right, Phil," he said promptly. "Please I'm sorry."

"How nice it is to hear you say 'Please I'm sorry' once more," she said, smiling. "It makes me think of the little girl I used to be who could never resist that appeal of yours for forgiveness. What a baby I was five years ago; and how I used to look up to you, and think that there was no one in the whole world like you, and how you used to make much of me and spoil me at one moment, and patronise and snub me at the next."

"My *dear* Phil," he replied, in gay derision, "upon my word, to hear a gorgeous vision like you talking about being snubbed sounds too ridiculous."

"Nonsense, Peter, it is quite true. All the same, you were very good to me, you dear old boy, although perhaps sometimes just a little bit overbearing."

"Well," said Peter, in a tone of amused conviction, "it's pretty easy to see which of us two is the more likely to be overbearing in future. At our very first meeting you bully me unmercifully . . . you say I'm extravagant and fast going to the dogs . . . and that altogether I'm an awful ruffian."

"Oh, Peter," she protested quickly, "not an awful ruffian, dear. I never would believe anything really bad of you—of course, I never would."

"Thank you, Phil," he said simply, touched by her earnestness.

"All the same," she went on, "I confess I don't like to think of your sitting up all night, gambling with a lot of horrid men. On board ship they were dread-

ful . . . always playing cards and drinking. At least I don't mean *all* of them, of course . . . some of them were quite nice. Do you know a Captain Stubbs, Peter?" she asked rather hesitatingly, in a tone quite different from the frankly open, indeed boyish one of her previous remarks. "Captain Stubbs of the Twentieth Dragoon Guards?"

Peter, all unsuspecting, noticed nothing of this change in her manner. "Stubbs," said he, emphasising the aristocratic patronymic. "N-no, I've never actually met him . . . but I know his hideous name well enough, and all about him. He races a lot in Southern India. Where on earth did *you* come across him?"

"Oh, he was in Florence last winter," said Phillis, reddening a little at his tone. "We saw quite a lot of him. . . . He had a lovely car, and took us about a good deal. . . . Mother and father both liked him, and were glad he happened to be coming out on the same ship with me."

"Good Lord, Phil," said Peter, staring hard at her. "What on earth were they thinking about? . . . Surely you haven't lost your heart to a little bounder like that!"

"Peter, how horrid you are," she cried, flushing painfully. "He is not a little bounder. He . . . he only pronounces some of his words rather . . . queerly."

"Got an accent too, has he?" suggested Peter grimly.

"No, not an accent at all," she retorted indignantly. "Father said that it was Lancashire . . . and that all nice people in Lancashire talked like that. He is as kind as kind can be . . . and looked after me on the voyage, and . . ."

"Good Heavens, so that's it!" he exclaimed, genuinely

horrified at the lack of taste displayed by the Montague family, and quite losing sight of the fact that the 'little boulder' in question possessed an income of several thousand pounds a year.

"No, it isn't 'It,'" said Phillis defiantly, "whatever 'It' may mean. And don't say things like that to me, Peter. I . . . I won't have it."

The angry tears stood in her pretty eyes. Evidently she was very deeply offended, and turning her back on him, she talked unceasingly to the neglected old gourmand, until Mrs Cumberledge gave the signal for the ladies to take their departure.

As Phillis rose from her seat, not even Peter's 'Please I'm sorry' met with any response as she marched past him with a stony countenance.

"How ripping she looks," thought he, his eyes following her admiringly. "She makes all the rest of them seem underbred and common, just as Stella does on the racecourse," and his thoughts drifted to the other thoroughbred in which he was interested—his beautiful mare Stella. Interested is perhaps an inadequate term to apply to the feeling he entertained towards that uncertain and fickle favourite of his. Like so many of her charming sex, she was as unreliable and highly-strung as she was fair to look upon.

He had backed her for more than he dared to think of to win the big race in January; and he felt pretty sure she could pull it off if she wanted to. But there lay the difficulty—*would* she want to? No one could possibly foretell in what mood she would go down to the post. On her day there was nothing in the north of India to touch her over five furlongs. But there was always the fear that some little thing might occur

to upset her temper, in which case she would just stick her toes into the ground, and not try a yard.

"Well, Dare," said Colonel Kennedy, the fat man whose conversation during dinner poor Phillis had found so trying, "I hear you are going to win the Steward's Cup with that little mare of yours."

"I think so, sir," replied Peter, with the excessive politeness due to an officer of the colonel's exalted rank. "That is to say, if only I can keep her in a good temper. But she is very easily upset, sir, and when she is in one of her fractious moods, she just won't do anything for anybody."

"Ah, that reminds me of a horse I used to know," began the colonel, who was not really in the least bit interested in Peter's chances of winning, but as usual was on the look-out for a victim upon whom he might inflict some of his long-winded stories of a bygone age, when all the women were better-looking, by Gad, sir, and all the men were heroes; when the racehorses ran faster, and the tigers charged oftener, and battle, murder, and sudden death were of more frequent occurrence than in these degenerate days of ours!

A horrible old bore, this colonel. He commanded the Native Infantry Regiment, stationed at Ghazipur, and was one of the 'horsiest men on foot' in the whole army.

His only other claim to distinction lay in the fact that, on the strength of his culinary skill, he had once, in his younger days, been described by his colonel in his confidential report as a bad soldier but a good chef!

"Noble of the 14th owned the animal," continued Colonel Kennedy, his heavy face becoming almost animated. "You remember the 14th at Secunderabad?"

. . . ah! . . . that must have been before your time. Well, on the racecourse every Sunday morning we used to have leopard-sticking——”

“Leopard-sticking!” echoed Peter. “Lord, sir, that throws our pig-sticking rather into the shade!”

“Yes, sir, leopard-sticking,” repeated the colonel, somewhat huffily. “We had men out in the jungle who trapped the leopards and sent them in to us. Then on Sundays the cages containing the leopards——”

“More than one at a time, sir?” broke in Peter.

“Oh, yes, several. I can remember as many as five of ’em loose at once, but generally there were only one or two. What was I saying? . . . Oh, yes! the cages would be put in the middle of the racecourse, the doors thrown open, and away we would go, armed with hog-spears, after the vicious brutes. The 14th were a sporting crowd, and had a lot of horses of sorts. Personally, I think I could always outride any of ’em myself, if it came to a question of real horsemanship. But there,” modestly, “good hands are a gift, born with a man, not made. . . . But it was that horse of Noble’s you wanted to know about, young man, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, sir,” said Peter meekly.

“Well, he was a well-bred horse, and very fast. You don’t see ’em like that nowadays. He was perhaps a shade light in the bone, but had an exceptional turn of speed. He funk’d leopards—didn’t like the smell of them, or something—and Noble could never get him close in enough to give him a chance of spearing. He would dance round and round within a few yards of the leopard, but never would go right in. One day, whilst this performance was going on, a wounded leopard turned and charged Noble, mauling his horse

rather badly in the shoulder. The wound healed up all right, but the horse wouldn't let any one mount him. I heard of this, and thought I would like to have a try at riding him, so I asked Noble to lend him to me for the next Sunday's leopard hunt. Noble said I was quite welcome to have the beast, but that he was afraid it was quite impossible for any one to ride him after his fright. That, of course, didn't deter me, and on the Sunday morning in question, by means of covering his head up in a blanket, and jumping into the saddle without touching the stirrups, I got mounted all right, and rode off to the racecourse. There was a biggish field collected in the neighbourhood of the cage, which looked more like a gigantic mouse-trap than anything else, in which the leopards were kept. As we neared it, my horse, instead of as usual showing signs of fear, seemed to be infuriated at the sight of it, and it was all I could do to prevent his seizing hold of the bars with his teeth and wrenching them out. . . ."

As this amazing statement tripped lightly from his lips, Peter could scarcely restrain an expression of incredulity, and the colonel, with a half-suspicious glance in his direction, went on—

"I managed, after a tussle, to get him away from the cage whilst 'Mr Spots' was being let go. . . ."

Here Peter choked. 'Mr Spots!' What a designation for a leopard! He had heard that there existed in India certain abandoned individuals—calling themselves sportsmen—who were wont to speak of the tiger as 'Mr Stripes,' and hitherto this had always appeared to him to be the very nadir of vulgar banality. But 'Mr Spots!' Good heavens, would this extraordinary old fossil, he wondered, pursue his hideous metaphor

to the extent of speaking of 'Mrs Spots!' — possibly even of 'Miss Spots!' He choked again at the thought.

"The hunt was in full swing," went on the heavy voice, "before we actually joined in. Never, in all my days, have I ridden such a fiend as that horse had become. I had only a snaffle in his mouth, and he took complete charge from the moment we got going. Past the rest of the riders we went, as if they had been standing still, jostling them to right and left, and bringing down a couple, certainly, if not more. I had no time even to apologise. We were beyond them all like a flash, and alongside the leopard. Then, to my amazement, my infuriated horse actually tried to seize hold of the animal in his teeth. . . ."

Peter, whose face by this time was a study, thought it wiser to refrain from all comment, lest he should explode with suppressed laughter.

"Failing in that attempt," continued Colonel Kennedy, now thoroughly wound up, "he endeavoured to jump on it, at the same time striking out at it with his forefeet. Meanwhile, keeping a cool head, I managed to drive my spear into 'Mr Spots' near shoulder, upon which he whipped round and, wrenching the supple bamboo out of my grasp, went back in the direction from which we had come—carrying the spear with him, and scattering the field as he went. I confess I had had about enough of it by that time, but my horse was round after him like a shot, so snatching another spear from one of the native orderlies, I did my best to get on terms with the leopard once more. If you'll believe it, the beast headed straight for the grand stand, and finding the door of one of the dressing-rooms open, bolted in. My blood was

up, and caring nothing for the danger, I threw myself off my horse and rushed in after him. As I did so he sprang at me, but I was holding my spear well forward, and received him on the point of it. . . . Of course I was knocked over, but I picked myself up ready to go on with the battle. I was feeling full of fight, and a match for a dozen leopards! But there was no need, for there on the floor of the dressing-room lay the leopard, stone dead, with my spear right through the very middle of his heart. . . . Eh? . . . What?"

"I said, by Jove, that was jolly lucky for you, sir," replied Peter, diffidently, hard put to it to find a satisfactory and appropriate comment.

"Yes, sir," said the colonel, purple with pride and port. "That is the way we used to do things in the old days. Ah . . . they're making a move, I see. Well, I will just finish this glass of most excellent wine before I follow you."

Upon which, only too glad of the opportunity, Peter escaped, and, mingling with the black-coated throng, made his way to the drawing-room, from which the sound of music was audible.

"The old man must have changed a good deal," he said to himself, smiling. "Really, to see him nowadays sitting like a sack of potatoes on that old rocking-horse of a charger of his, one *might* be tempted to think he could never have been very much of a horseman at any time. Perhaps he dreamt it all!"

CHAPTER II.

“ Hope not sunshine every hour,
Fear not clouds will always lower.”

WHEN Peter reached the great drawing-room he found that it was Phillis who was at the piano. She was playing the Waldstein Sonata so beautifully that even the male portion of her audience was moved to admiration, and . . . almost . . . to silence !

Peter, who, with all his devotion to out-door sports, was still an ardent lover of music, thrilled with pleasure.

Somehow, he had never for a moment contemplated the possibility of Phillis's being a brilliant performer like this. True, she had told him she had ‘gone in’ for music; but he had, for some reason or another, taken it for granted that her efforts in that direction were sure to be of the same pitiful order as those of most of the damsels he had met with in India—and that the less said about them the better.

Fond as he was of the ‘Shiny East,’ and of soldiering, he none the less had frequently felt a hunger, a craving almost, for the musical delights of London and Paris, where he could revel to his heart's content in the joy of listening to the masterpieces of the Great, interpreted by Genius, faultlessly rendered by loving,

reverent hands—or, as he himself would have put it, he would have given a good deal to escape for a bit from his surroundings, from the 'savages' who had no ideas beyond eating and drinking and sleeping, and get back once more to civilisation. And now to find that little Phillis was so delightfully accomplished—what a surprise and joy!

Immediately he began to plan delicious hours during which he would get her to play to him from all his favourites—from Chopin, and Beethoven, and Greig, and that Frenchman too, Saint Saens, whose . . . "Bridge, Dare?" said a voice at his elbow.

It was his host the Commissioner, a bald-headed, slightly pompous old gentleman of the old school, whose well-rounded periods appropriately accorded with the generous contours of his well-rounded figure.

"No, thank you, sir, not to-night," said Peter.

"Well, then, I'm afraid we shan't get another table, Kennedy."

"Nonsense, Dare," said Colonel Kennedy with a snort, looking more pig-like than ever; "you *must* give us our revenge, after the way you robbed us all the last time we dined here."

Put like this, Peter could not very well refuse to play, so, sorely against his will—since, above all things, he wanted to make his peace with Phillis, and at the same time to enjoy this new-found accomplishment of hers—he accompanied them to the verandah where the Bridge-tables were set out.

"Here we can smoke," said Mr Cumberledge, "and make ourselves comfortable. Put the cigars and cigarettes there, Abdul," he went on, turning to a servant, and pointing towards a carved Indian table.

"And bring whisky and soda-water. Brandy too," he added. "You always drink brandy, don't you, Kennedy?"

"Thanks. Come on, Dare, cut."

And they sat down to their gloomy occupation which kept them busy till nearly midnight.

Meanwhile Phillis, after playing several times, had left the piano, and was now comfortably seated beside the long window, enjoying her first glimpse of the gorgeous Indian moonlight that was transfiguring the landscape—turning the most commonplace of plaster buildings into marble palaces, and all the tiniest streams of water into glittering silver threads.

Near her was seated Major Denison of the West-shires. On being introduced to her before dinner, he had told her that he was Peter Dare's 'Skipper.' And although Phillis had not quite grasped what this term signified—which was not surprising perhaps, since she had understood him to say 'kipper,' a word connected in her mind solely with herrings—still, the fact that there appeared to be a tie of some sort between him and her old playmate had at once aroused her interest.

He was very good-looking, she thought, as she glanced at his dark, regular features; but his eyes had a bitter expression, and although his smile was pleasant enough, still his face, when in repose, seemed drawn, and was undoubtedly a little hard.

He looked, she told herself, as if he had some quarrel with life; and indeed this surmise of hers was by no means far from being correct.

He *had* a bitter quarrel with life, with Fate rather—vindictive, malicious Fate, he called it—the impotent plaything of which he felt himself to be.

During the South African War he had been wounded

in the right hand, and, owing to the fact that the bullet had severed some of the essential tendons or ligaments, the whole arm, as well as the hand itself, had become shrunken, and atrophied, and useless. He could not even write with it, much less carry a sword or take part in any of the sports or outdoor games—tests alike of courage and endurance—in which he felt it was his duty as a soldier to excel, and after which his soul hungered. To any Englishman a loss such as this must always mean a very great deal, more perhaps than it should. Yet, without the various sports and games, without this savage lust for slaughter, this deplorable mania for ‘hitting at a ball with a stick,’ the physique of the race would undoubtedly deteriorate, the prowess of England’s manhood inevitably decay.

For every sort of game Fitzroy Denison had always possessed an extraordinary facility. It was therefore all the harder for him now to be for ever debarred from these absorbing forms of exercise.

On the whole, he bore his affliction well, for he had a very sweet nature, courageous and unselfish. But every now and again a dark flood of resentful bitterness would sweep over him, engulfing him in its black depths, and then, at the very slightest provocation, he would be only too ready remorselessly to snap off the head of his dearest friend; to scarify, with all the satire of which his biting, clever tongue was capable, any one foolish enough inadvertently to cross his path.

In consequence, he had gained the reputation—not altogether justly, since it described but one side of his nature—of being something of a cynic, very liable to sudden attacks of sarcasm and spleen.

"Enjoying the beauties of the night, Miss Montague?" he asked with a smile, thinking what a pretty picture of fresh young English girlhood she made.

"Yes, indeed," replied Phillis with enthusiasm. "How brilliant the moonlight is in India. I have never seen anything like it in my life."

"Makes it harder than ever to realise," he said, looking up at the cloudless sky in which the moon hung like a gleaming silver lamp, "that she's only a worn-out fragment of our old earth, with no light whatever of her own."

"Yes, doesn't it seem wonderful," she assented. "I suppose it must be nearly full moon to-night; it looks so very big and round. I have never quite grasped, you know," she went on after a moment hesitatingly, "though I suppose it must sound dreadfully ignorant to say so, why sometimes it's a great shining disc as it is to-night, and sometimes just a weeny little silver sickle. It's something to do with the shadow of the earth, isn't it?"

"Oh, you're mixing it up with an eclipse," said Denison laughing. In these modern days of culture he had imagined that such refreshing ignorance was quite a thing of the past. "Anyhow, you know better than to think that she grows from new to full in a few hours, don't you? And that is what old Colonel Wilson of the Hussars seemed to expect her to do the other night when he dined at our Mess."

"He didn't!" exclaimed Phillis incredulously.

"Oh yes, he did," was the amused reply. "It was like this; he had rather a long drive home to look forward to after dinner, and was anxious about the weather. So on leaving the table, we all went out-

side to look at the night. It was pretty dark, with no stars to speak of, and only just the faintest crescent of the new moon visible. After examining this very carefully through his eyeglass, the dear old boy said doubtfully, 'She's a bit small just now certainly, but by the time I'm ready to go, no doubt she will have grown big enough to light me home!'"

"Delightful old ignoramus," laughed Phillis.

At that moment Mrs Cumberledge bore down upon her, beaming benevolence, and once more requisitioned her service at the piano.

There the poor child played accompaniment after accompaniment, whilst well-meaning but evil-doing youths and maidens gave ludicrous renderings, unintentional travesties, of a number of well-known songs, until she was nearly worn out.

At last the most exalted of the guests—a lady whose husband held some important position in the Civil Service which entitled him, according to the grotesque Indian Table of Precedence, to rank above most Generals—took her leave, and was shortly followed by the rest. Fortunately for Peter, Phillis could not find it in her heart to nourish for very long the resentment that, earlier in the evening, she had displayed towards him, and when she bade him good-night, held out the olive branch together with her hand, as she said to him with the sweetest of smiles—

"When are you coming to see me, Peter?"

"I'll come to-morrow," he said quickly. "If I can, that is to say. There's a big parade on; our new Colonel's first appearance . . . and we may be kept late in the Orderly Room afterwards. Anyway, be sure to make Mrs Cumberledge bring you to polo on

Wednesday. I particularly want to introduce you to Stella."

"Stella," she repeated in a tone of surprise. "Why, who is she?"

He laughed gaily.

"Who is *she*? Why, the beautiful mare I told you about, of course—the priceless treasure who is going to win me a fortune at the next Race-meeting, and set me on my feet again. She'll be down at the polo ground, as I'm going to give her a gallop round the course when the game is over."

"Oh, I am just dying to see her," said Phillis, all eagerness. Then, as their hands met, she added softly, "And Peter, you mustn't quarrel with me any more, please."

"Never, Phil, never, never again, I promise," he said earnestly. "Good-night."

Next morning Peter was awakened very early indeed—as of late had been only too frequently the case—by tiresome, harassing thoughts of difficulties in the present, and gloomy and depressing forebodings for the future.

The room in which he slept was large and bare; the floor was covered with matting, and on it, in varying stages of shabbiness, were spread a number of Kashmir rugs.

The ceiling—as is usual in India—was made of whitewashed canvas. This bulged rather in places, and was torn at one corner, where a great flap hung down, allowing a glimpse to be obtained of the dark space between the ceiling-cloth and the thatched roof high above. In this space lived many strange beasts, the pattering of whose feet on the canvas could often

be heard from the room below. A flourishing colony of rats and mice and lizards made their home there, and an occasional scorpion. Snakes also were not infrequent visitors—two cobras having been discovered and killed there in the brief period during which Peter had occupied the room.

He shared the bungalow with three of his brother officers: Major Denison, whom he thought the very best fellow in the whole world; the Adjutant, Captain the Honourable James Seton; and a rather dull-witted subaltern named Platt.

Major Denison—who was really only a Captain in the Regiment, but had obtained a Brevet Majority for distinguished service in South Africa—commanded the Company to which, on joining the Westshires, Peter had been posted, and with which happily he was still serving. They got along admirably together, Peter and his 'Skipper,' and both of them had quite an affection for their unintelligent stable-companion—honest, thick-headed Platt—whom they called Platitude for short!

Poor Platitude, they led him rather a life. Not only was he entirely devoid of all sense of humour, but to make matters worse, whenever he opened his mouth—which fortunately was not very often—he always managed to put somebody's back up. He appeared to have a veritable genius for rubbing people the wrong way. It was quite lamentable, since all his ineptitudes were perpetrated with the very best intentions in the world, nothing being further from his thoughts or desires than to give offence to a soul.

Curiously enough, this far from bright specimen, who in moments of emotion was afflicted with a violent and

distressing stammer, was marvellously endowed with the gift of tongues, and could, as Denison drily declared, be 'dull as ditch-water in no less than five languages.' The other occupant of the bungalow, Captain Seton, was the most unpopular officer in the regiment. His father, a solicitor of obscure origin, had recently been created a Law Lord, and James Seton, to his inexpressible delight, had consequently blossomed out into an Honourable.

He was known generally throughout the regiment by the endearing title of 'Snake.'

This was the most apt of nicknames, and summed up in a word all the tortuous and ophidian characteristics of his subterranean nature. He had one particular weakness, out of which the Regiment made much capital—he had been educated at Eton, and was inordinately proud of the fact. Never did he let slip an opportunity of dragging it in. He could not, by any chance, bring himself to say simply, 'So-and-so was at school with me'; it was always, 'was at Eton with me,' or, 'We used to do this or that at Eton,' *ad nauseam*.

He even went the length of calling one of his ponies 'Eton Boy.' Denison, himself an old Etonian, but of a very different stamp, had one day rather successfully turned this absurd propensity of his into ridicule by holding in the Mess a mock christening at which a horrible old spaniel named Dinah—which Snake had owned and neglected for many years—was publicly, and with great pomp and solemnity, renamed 'out of compliment to the old school,' Eton Girl!

To Peter, lying wakeful upon his camp bed, as the faint, grey light of dawn slid stealthily through the open window, gradually revealing, with momentarily increasing

distinctness, all the ugly familiar features of his room, came a multitude of disquieting thoughts.

"If Stella doesn't pull off that race," he soliloquised yawning, "I'm a 'goner.' There'll be nothing for it but for me to go into the Supply and Transport, or the Burma Police. In any case, I ought to see about selling the polo ponies. . . . Polo isn't for paupers! But I mustn't be in too great a hurry about it. It's fatal selling in a hurry—makes it impossible to get a decent price. If only," he went on, with another yawn, stretching his long arms above his head, "If only I can manage to keep them till after the tournament, and play them a little extra well in it, then I should think I ought to be able to get something like their full value for them. I must do something; my old friend, the Hindu banker, is beginning to feel a bit anxious about that money he lent me. My last interview with him was not altogether satisfactory, either from my point of view or," smiling ruefully, "judging from the fuss he made, from his. I certainly had extraordinary bad luck last Thursday, playing Poker at that Commissariat fella's house, but of course it was my own silly fault going on as I did, and losing such a devil of a lot. Hang all these money troubles! They are most demoralising . . . worst possible thing for the temper, too. Why, I should like to know, should I have to worry myself into fits about a few trifling hundreds, whilst a little bounder like that Stubbs fella Phil seems to have taken a fancy to, has more money than he knows what to do with, hang him!"

It was not without good reason that Peter felt sore on the subject of money, since, until lately, his prospects had been of the rosiest. Left an orphan early in life, he had been brought up at Croyston—the big estate in

Yorkshire which had been in the Dare family for centuries—by his rich old bachelor uncle, Colonel Sir Peter Dare, whose heir he was ; and naturally enough, he had looked forward to being one day very well off indeed.

But within the last year this old gentleman—to the surprise of all his friends, and to the consternation of Peter—had married a young wife ; and had, moreover, signalised the event by writing to inform his luckless nephew that under the changed condition of things, he must no longer look to him for anything beyond a very small allowance.

Long ago, before he came into the baronetcy, Sir Peter had served for a considerable number of years with the Westshire Regiment in India ; and had views on the subject of subalterns' allowances.

Very decided views these were too, by no means to be controverted by statistics or argument. He had known India in the days when the cost of living was infinitesimal compared with what it is at present, and looked upon Peter's veracious accounts of his enormously increased and increasing expenditure as so many diverting fables which were not altogether innocent of ulterior motive.

Even Major Anstruther, the second in command of the Westshires, who had served long ago with the old baronet and was a great favourite of his, was quite unable to persuade him to modify his ideas, and loosen the purse-strings on his nephew's behalf.

His uncle's marriage had, of course, been a severe blow to Peter, who, without being criminally extravagant, had none the less acquired many expensive tastes, and now found it very difficult to alter his way of living, and to cut his coat according to the exceedingly limited cloth

at his disposal. Indeed, with every intention of reducing his expenditure, he had not as yet actually done anything definite towards the furtherance of that laudable object. On the contrary, in order to liquidate some of the more pressing of his liabilities, he had had recourse to the ruinous expedient of borrowing—from a native usurer euphemistically called a banker—what was, for one in his circumstances, a rather large sum of money.

“There,” he exclaimed, sitting up in bed and thumping his pillow vindictively, “what an idiot I am! I have actually worked myself into a passion just because some little outsider is better off than I am. What could be more utterly futile and ridiculous? I ought to be jolly glad things are no worse than they are. . . . Why, I might have had to be a crossing-sweeper! Ugh . . .” he went on, giving rein to his imagination, “I can picture myself sweeping away at some beastly crossing on a raw, foggy day in London . . . with the mud squelching up between my bare toes, and no one giving me any pennies . . . with no home to go to, and nothing to look forward to but misery, and hunger, and death. . . . How do those lines go? . . .

‘We know not whether Death be good,
But Life, at least, it will not be.’

“I bet a crossing-sweeper feels that as long as ‘Life, at least, it will not be,’ it is bound to be an improvement on his present wretched condition. But to the deuce with such glooming. . . . ‘My head is bloody, but unbowed!’ I shall pull through all right. Ah, there’s the cheerful chink of china, at last. Thank God for early tea!”

Here the entrance of his faithful old retainer David, whose dusky countenance lit up, and whose white teeth flashed in a gleaming smile, when he saw that his young master was awake, put an end to further reflections.

"Hurry up, you old ruffian," said Peter, sitting up in bed and pouring himself out a cup of tea. "If you are not quick I shall be late for parade."

Such an unwarrantable aspersion on the character he bore of irreproachable gentleman's valet could not be passed over by David in silence.

"Plenty time, master. Never being late," he replied, as he moved noiselessly about the room, making with deft hands the necessary preparations for Peter's toilet. "Shaving water ready, sir," he presently announced.

Thereupon, after one last luxurious yawn, Peter jumped out of bed, and was soon busy scraping away at his chin before the small camp mirror that stood on the dressing-table.

This operation over, he made his way speedily to the adjoining bathroom, from which for the next five minutes the sound of vigorous splashing could be heard throughout the house.

Glowing from his tub, and with several shining drops of water still clinging to his closely cropped hair, he dashed back once more to the bedroom where his servant had put ready his khaki uniform, and in an incredibly short space of time, with the skilful assistance of the old native, he got himself into it. Then mounting one of the threatened polo ponies—a very handsome, glossy, black Arab, who rejoiced in the name of Bill—and taking care to keep to the grass at the side of the road, he cantered away gaily to the parade-ground.

"Bill, my boy," he said to the pony in confidence, "a sword of Damocles, composed of debts, hangs over your devoted head. A Damocles sword of Damocles debts," he went on, with mock solemnity, making light as usual of all his cares and troubles.

This gift, which he possessed in a very marked degree, of laughing in the face of misfortune, of minimising all difficulties and dangers, had already frequently stood him in good stead. Many a time during the war in South Africa, when things seemed to be going all wrong, his unvarying cheerfulness, his unswerving belief that everything was bound to be 'as right as rain,' had put fresh heart into his tired men, and helped them on their weary toilsome way.

Not that he was by any means singular in the possession of this quality of light-hearted endurance. The spirit which enables men to keep a stout heart 'under the bludgeonings of Chance,' is happily characteristic of the English race—a valuable national asset. Still such eagerness as that with which, throughout the campaign, Peter had always seized upon every opportunity for the display of self-sacrificing courage, cannot be said, with truth, to have been universal.

Unfortunately his indifference to dangers and privations, his cheerful readiness to embark on any and every perilous enterprise that was afoot, had not, by any means, brought him the kudos that such admirable qualities deserved. His ardent nature chafed at the restraints of discipline; his passionate spirit would not readily brook the curb. As ill-luck would have it, during all the latter part of the war he had been away from his regiment, serving with mounted infantry, under the command of a certain stout little major, named

Williams. This heroic officer, known familiarly and derisively throughout the corps by the significant title of 'Ant-heap Willie,' used to complain that Lieutenant Dare was always taking his men too far . . . holding on to positions in the face of a superior force of the enemy, too long . . . in fact, that he was always overdoing it . . . exceeding his orders . . . and playing the devil all round.

Eventually Peter came to be looked upon—in this unenterprising and stick-in-the-mud corps with which for the time being he had the misfortune to be serving—as a sort of firebrand, a source of danger to them all.

And he *would* ride a grey pony, too! This was, in reality, the head and front of his offending—though none of them quite liked to say so in so many words.

This grey pony—a splendid little hunter in miniature that he had picked up in Natal—used to carry him from dawn to dusk, for days together, without a sign of fatigue, and in consequence was worth his weight in gold to a hard-working, hard-riding officer like Peter, who never for a moment thought of sparing either himself or his mount in the service of his country.

The *colour* was what they objected to . . . so noticeable from a distance, they said . . . providing the enemy with a target for miles.

It was on this very subject that Peter had his first passage of arms with the commandant. 'Don't come near me,' roared the little man, 'on that infernal grey pony of yours—drawing all the enemy's fire! Go away, sir, go away!' Peter, having just galloped back, under a hot fire, with some important information, from a

position quite half a mile in advance of the substantial ant-heap behind which his commanding officer was taking such careful cover, gave vent to his feelings of annoyance and contempt in rather more forcible language than can possibly be defended.

That sharp tongue of his—and rarely did he let slip an opportunity of making use of it, wretched boy!—was largely responsible for the majority of his troubles and disappointments.

Perhaps it was only natural, in the heat of the moment, after an action in which he had been left with a small party, unsupported, to oppose an overwhelming force of the enemy, or after a failure to make a big capture, owing to the fact that the greater part of the stick-in-the-mud mounted infantry had not turned up in time to speak a few winged words to the man whose inefficiency—pusillanimity rather—was directly responsible for such occurrences.

But the consequences were disastrous.

His report from the little commandant at the end of the war was by no means altogether a favourable one. Lieutenant Dare was certainly a good horseman . . . gallant and full of dash . . . a good leader . . . and half a dozen other good things. 'Nevertheless,' wrote the stout little major, still smarting at the memory of some of Peter's scathing remarks that had turned his fears into ridicule, 'I feel compelled to add that this officer is, in my opinion, passionate and impatient—reckless and insubordinate—making a mock of all things!'

So at the termination of hostilities, when many far less deserving officers were singled out for distinction

and advancement, Peter found that there was nothing for him but a bare Mention in Despatches.

This taught him, or should have done so, the bitter but wholesome lesson that outbursts of passion do not lead to promotion, nor home-truths to honours and rewards.

CHAPTER III.

“Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn’d.”

PETER was in plenty of time for parade after all.

Such a parade too! Indignant as it made him, it none the less had its amusing side, and he would not have missed it for worlds.

This was the first opportunity the Westshires had had of taking stock of the brand-new colonel who had recently been imported—Heaven alone knew why!—from another, and, in their opinion, a vastly inferior regiment, to command them.

Lieutenant-Colonel Weir, M.V.O., was a stout, ugly man, with a very long body and very short legs. With the exception of a small tuft of grey hair on either side of his head in the neighbourhood of his ears, he was completely bald. He had a hectoring, overbearing manner, a loud, penetrating voice, and, in addition to these peculiarities, was the proud possessor of a gigantic hooked nose, which feature had earned for him throughout the service the nickname of ‘Punch.’

It was very soon apparent that according to *his* ideas the Westshires, who happened to be about the

smartest regiment at drill in the whole of India, could do nothing right. It was necessary, or so he appeared to think, to repeat the very simplest movements time after time. Still the insatiable Colonel shouted for more, interspersing his violent orders with intensely uncomplimentary remarks on the appearance and efficiency of the battalion—both officers and men. To the astonishment of everybody, Major Anstruther, the Second-in-Command, the smartest and most popular officer in the regiment, came in for a generous share of this undeserved abuse.

"Why should he be so attentive to you, 'A'?" asked Denison, making use of the name by which Anstruther was known to all his friends.

"Oh, the Colonel and I are old acquaintances," was the reply, *sotto voce*. "I am anathema to him."

"Major Anstruther," roared Colonel Weir, again and again, in that dreadful voice of his, "What the . . . Why the . . . How the . . ." &c., &c.

At first the Second-in-Command appeared to bear this torrent of invective with absolute unconcern. But as time went on his indifference gave place to indignation, and when the cyclonic parade at length came to an end, he rode over, looking very tall and straight and soldier-like, to where 'Punch,' a grotesque figure, his feet scarcely reaching the lower edge of his saddle-flap, sat perched upon the sorry steed that served him for a charger, and said somewhat heatedly—

"I am not accustomed to being spoken to on parade like that, sir!"

To which the colonel replied with his high, neighing laugh—

"Oh, you're not accustomed to it, Major Anstruther?"

he! he! Then you must *get* accustomed to it, Major Anstruther. You must get accustomed to it, sir."

After delivering this Parthian shot, he turned his horse's head and, feeling that he had indeed begun his day's work well, ambled away. In the first place he had let this new regiment of his, which thought itself so smart, see pretty clearly that he meant to stand no nonsense; and at the same time he had given what he congratulated himself was 'a nasty knock' to that 'conceited, superior devil, Anstruther,' against whom he had for many years nourished a bitter enmity. 'At last,' he thought to himself, 'I shall have an opportunity of paying off old scores!'

On more than one occasion they had been stationed together, Anstruther and he; and memories now came crowding into his vindictive little mind of many a wild and turbulent scene, enacted in divers Messes, both at home and abroad, during the small hours of the morning, when all the senior officers had gone to bed, and every vestige of restraint and decorum had been cast to the winds.

These scenes of revelry used, as often as not, to end with a mock Court Martial, at which it generally fell to his lot to figure in the unenviable *rôle* of 'Prisoner,' and 'this fellow Anstruther, damn him,' had always been the foremost amongst his tormentors. So it was not altogether to be wondered at that the feelings he now entertained towards his good-looking Second-in-Command, who excelled in every form of sport and manly exercise, and was in all respects his very antithesis, were of anything but a friendly nature.

As for Anstruther, he had always looked upon

'Punch' with undisguised contempt. He even went so far as to resent the fact of his being an officer at all.

Once at Aldershot, as he sat in the club refreshing himself with a long drink after polo, he had been overheard by 'Punch'—whose slinking ways frequently caused him to hear remarks never intended for his ears—holding forth at some length on the subject.

"Such a grotesque gnome," Anstruther had said with his magnificent air of intolerance, as he brandished a gigantic cigar at his audience, "such a ridiculous mannikin masqueradin' as an officer and a gentleman brings Her Majesty's Service into disrepute—haw—and plays the very devil with the prestige of the royal regiments of the line."

Now Colonel Weir, who had a tenacious memory, had stored his mind with bitter recollections such as these. Every slight to which he had been subjected, all the ridicule that Anstruther in the old days had heaped upon him with so lavish a hand, was remembered. There was no such thing with him as letting bygones be bygones. No generous impulse ever stirred his soured soul, and now that fortune, kind beyond his wildest hopes, had delivered his old enemy into his hands, he promised himself the exquisite satisfaction of getting 'a bit of his own' back.

It was not until next day that Peter found time to go and call on Phillis. Custom has decreed that calls in India shall be made during the very hottest part of the day, between the hours of twelve and two; and Peter, as he drove through the dazzling sunshine along the glaring yellow road to the Com-

missioner's house, wished from the bottom of his heart that Custom had not been quite so idiotic in her choice of calling hours.

"There's one thing I must remember," he said to himself, "and that is on no account to mention the loathsome name of Stubbs."

He recalled the vision of blue lightnings flashing from Miss Phillis's indignant eyes at his first word of disparagement of 'the little bounder'; how she had blazed into sudden wrath, and got into what long ago they would have called a 'state.'

What did it all mean? he wondered. Surely she couldn't care for a fellow like that. Girls were rum, though. Why, the very nicest of them, as often as not, didn't even know when a man *was* a bounder—girls who, one would have thought, couldn't possibly have helped knowing 'what was what.' It did seem queer. He couldn't understand it a bit.

There were several people calling at the Commissioner's, and he scarcely had any conversation with Phillis after all.

Disgusted at not finding her alone, and, boy-like, quite unable before a lot of strangers to talk at all, he very soon took his departure without having made any plans whatever for the future, without having told her of any of the rides and drives for which he meant to take her, of the music he hoped she would play to him, of the dances they would dance, the talks they would enjoy, the times they would have.

"I hope you will be able to come to tea with us on Sunday," said Mrs Cumberledge, as he bade her good-bye. "Major Denison is coming, and you and he generally go about together, I know."

Peter accepted gladly, and made his escape from the 'beastly crowd of strangers.'

"Wish I hadn't come," he said to himself moodily, as he walked across the hall.

"My 'goodny me,' what a cross face!" said a mocking, but strangely sweet voice, and Mrs Curtis, who had just driven up to the door, sprang smiling from her car, followed by an avalanche of dogs. "Go away, you wretches," she cried; "you'll spoil my frock with your muddy feet. Help, help, Mr Dare! Rescue me from these exuberant angels."

"Down!" cried Peter threateningly, brandishing his stick.

The dogs, all rough-coated fox-terriers, white as snow, with black-and-tan markings on their saucy, mischievous faces, wagged their short tails spasmodically, and almost seemed to smile.

"You don't think we're afraid of sticks, do you, man?" he fancied they were saying, confident that no sort of ill-treatment would ever be permitted by their beloved mistress.

Happy lives were theirs, as happy as could be. Mollie Curtis loved her dogs.

"They have such short—such little, little lives, poor darlings," she used to say, "and the least we can do is to see that they enjoy every moment of them."

Lucky dogs indeed.

They were all in the very pink of condition; bright-eyed and brisk, tails erect, white coats gleaming like silver, noses moist and shining-black with health.

"Good dogs!" she said, as they clustered round her lovingly. "Now, no more jumping up, mind," with warning finger uplifted, as some of them showed signs

of renewing the attack. "Stay here and be good, whilst missus pays her call; see? Aren't they sweet?" she said, turning to Peter, who was thinking what a pretty picture they made—this dainty fairy surrounded by her 'lucky dogs.' "Why do you never come to see me?" she asked, glancing up at him with that pathetic look which no man had ever been known to resist. "I'm always at home at tea-time."

"I . . . I should like to come awfully," said Peter eagerly.

"Well, come to-day—after polo. Will you?"

"*Rather!*" he replied.

"Au revoir, then," and nodding smilingly to him she ran lightly up the steps to the door, turning at the last moment to shake an admonitory finger at the group of dogs waiting patiently below. "He's rather a dear," she said to herself. "And why shouldn't I be friends with him, I should like to know? I don't care a bit what 'A' says about my not being allowed to spoil any of the boys in *his* regiment. Spoil them indeed! Pouf! Silly old 'A'—jealous as can be if I speak to a soul. Shall be friends—shall—shall!"

Careless, thoughtless, light-hearted—she was little more than a child, after all—Mollie Curtis unfortunately was not always very circumspect in these numerous ardent friendships of hers, which appeared to demand unlimited worship and devotion on the man's side in return for a few smiles, a few dances, a little passing interest and sympathy, on hers.

Her husband, the judge—Billy, she called him—was very much older than herself, and an exceedingly busy man. "Morning, noon, and night, in his wretched old court," she used to say.

He was thankful that she should amuse herself, and trusted her implicitly. "Billy doesn't mind," was her invariable response when Major Anstruther—who was Billy's cousin, and had consequently certain privileges—used to remonstrate with her on the subject of her 'danglers.'

Somehow, she never could bear this term of 'A's'; it was always a safe 'draw,' and never failed to make her furious. Danglers indeed!

"Anyway, it doesn't sound as bad as 'followers,'" he said, "such as the cook or the scullery-maid might have. . . ."

Then she cried, and he had to retract, and was made to say that he didn't really think as badly of her as he pretended. "But for all that, I don't like the idea of your getting yourself talked about," he told her. "India's a beastly place for that sort of thing. You've no idea what brutes people are, you silly little Mollie."

But none of 'A's' admonitions availed one jot. Wherever the little witch went admirers flocked in her train; danglers dangled; hearts broke.

She fascinated one and all, and no man was safe from the spell of her extraordinary charm. Through it all she really kept her head remarkably well, her only feeling towards her adorers being one of amusement at the 'silliness' of mankind. There was not one among them all who had the power to make her heart beat one single throb faster. She played fearlessly with fire, and remained unscathed.

Perhaps it was her affection—it could scarcely be called love—for her 'dear old Billy' that rendered her thus immune; perhaps her safety lay in the coldness of her nature; but be that as it may, the fact

remained that, fond of flirtation and gaiety, of admiration and excitement, as she undoubtedly was, still her heart remained untouched. All the passion, all the devotion she inspired in the breasts of her worshippers failed to move her.

Latterly, even dear old 'A,' she thought, had been behaving rather queerly. Surely *he* was not going to be 'silly' about her at his time of life. What nonsense; and she lightly brushed aside the idea. But even as she did so, her heart seemed to contract with a feeling akin to fear. It was *not* fear, of course, she said to herself very decidedly. Oh, no, how could it be? What was there to be afraid of? Dear old 'A.' Nothing could be more platonic than their feelings towards one another. But suppose . . . just suppose now . . . that suddenly he were to lose his head, and become . . . what they called 'infatuated' about her, like so many of the others. What then . . . ?

She could see him quite clearly now if she shut her eyes tight; she had often done it before. His was the sort of face, she supposed, that made a more deep impression than most on the brain. There was nothing in that. Or . . . was it only on *her* brain that the impression was so startlingly distinct? Nonsense! It was that long thin nose of his, of course, and his moustache, 'like the wing of a bird,' that made it easy to call up such a vivid picture of him . . . that was all. How tall he was, too, and how well he carried himself. People always said, "Who's that?" when he walked past.

Only yesterday, when he had come striding up to her after polo, in long boots, clanking his spurs, she had said, laughing at him, "You look exactly like a

great big swaggering, roystering cavalier, 'A'—only I'm not quite sure what the word 'roystering' means."

"Well, it's a very bad word, and you're a naughty little girl to use it," had been his reply. And then he had said—what was it he had said—looking as solemn as solemn, with face a yard long, "Mollie child, you grow more and more beautiful every day. . . ." Which, of course, was sheer rubbish . . . because no one with a turned-up nose could ever be beautiful!

She mustn't see so much of 'A' in future. He was *always* with her. Billy was fond of him, of course; but . . . well she didn't mean to have him so often to the house, that was all. Afraid? Nonsense! Old 'A' indeed! Why, he was a hundred and four at least! She would go about more with that nice Dare boy. That's what she would do. Boys were always so fresh and jolly—and didn't moon about looking aggrieved if one talked to any one else. She had no patience with such nonsense.

That afternoon, directly polo was over, Peter drove off in a great hurry to have tea, as arranged, with Mrs Curtis.

Flushed and rather excited, at the same time a trifle embarrassed, and feeling not a little awkward and shy, he entered the enchanted sanctuary. She was not there.

Whilst the servant went to tell his mistress that a visitor had arrived, he amused himself by examining, as well as he could, the charming dimly lit room.

The colour scheme of purple and gold was carried out even to the flowers, which consisted of masses of deep-hued violets and tall flaring sun-flowers. The carpet and all the hangings were of a dark shade of purple, and the sombre effect of this was lighted by

gleams of gold and shining brass, that flickered from gilded cornices and twinkling mirrors, and glowed from burnished copper bowls that stood in every corner and recess of the great room.

Dainty shades of chiffon and gold-coloured silk softened and subdued the amber light, which lamps of fantastic Eastern workmanship shed over the fair and fragrant scene.

Never before had Peter—an ardent lover of the beautiful—seen a room that made so strong an appeal to all that was artistic in his nature.

He was standing lost in contemplation of the sensuous beauty of his surroundings when a slight rustle coming from the direction of one of the numerous curtained doorways recalled him to himself, and looking round, he saw as pretty a picture as ever gladdened the eyes of mortal man.

Mollie Curtis stood framed in the doorway, holding back with one slim hand the heavy folds of the dark curtain. An intoxicating smile of welcome was on her lips, and illumined her exquisite little face.

"Well, my solemn knight," she cried, with a merry laugh, as she came forward swiftly towards him, a delicate hand extended in greeting.

"If I was looking solemn," he said, smiling down at her, "it was from anxiety. I was afraid you were never coming—that you had forgotten."

"And were you very anxious?" she asked coquettishly.

"I was eaten up with anxiety," he replied.

"Poor boy," she said, with large-eyed sympathy; "how dreadful. Anyhow, you'll let me give what's left of you some tea, won't you—the remnant of you that hasn't been eaten up, I mean?"

And, laughing adorably, she led the way across the room to where, in a corner by an open window, the daintily spread tea-table beamed a welcome.

"Turn up those lights a little," she said; "our deeds are not so evil that we need sit in darkness. Now, the hanging one please," pointing to an antique, mysterious-looking lamp of intricate Indian filigree-work, on which strange monsters, gods, and devils disported themselves.

This glowing orb, which looked as though it were set with great jewels where the light shone through, was suspended from the lofty ceiling by slender chains of gold, just as, a century before, it had hung in a Hindu temple, and dumbly witnessed many a grim and grisly ceremony, many a weird and savage rite.

"There, that's better," she said as he turned up the light. "How tall you are—the servants always have to get on a chair before they can reach it."

Her piquante face, uplifted to the glow, seemed like a flower turning towards the sun. Could anything in the world, thought Peter, be more incongruous than the presence of this gruesome—this wicked—old lamp in the fair shrine of so gracious a goddess?

If he imagined he was going to enjoy a prolonged tête-à-tête with his fascinating hostess, he was very soon undeceived.

He had scarcely had time to drink one cup of the ambrosial fluid she poured out for him so prettily, when Captain Seton was ushered in. The Honourable James was clearly very much at home, and made himself quite comfortable in the corner beside Mrs Curtis, who supplied him with some tea and an enormous slice of sugared cake.

She found him useful to fetch and carry, she had told 'A,' when he laughed at her for encouraging a 'Snake' to come to the house.

Close upon his heels came two gauche youths in the Indian Civil Service and a man in the Native Cavalry, who had all driven up from polo together, and last of all, Major Anstruther himself.

"Are dogs admitted?" he asked, as he stood in the doorway, restraining with some difficulty the efforts of an enormously fat brown spaniel to force her way into the room.

"Oh, yes," Mollie replied. "Why, what on earth have you got there?"

"This, ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "is the famous 'Eton Girl'—the property of the Honourable 'Snake,' who neglects her shamefully, hence her misplaced affection for me. See how my man has rigged her out! She despises any colours but these," and, laughing, he pointed towards the poor old dog, who, breathing stertorously, came shuffling up the room with an enormous bow of Eton blue fastened to her collar. She was greeted with peals of laughter, in which Seton rather half-heartedly joined.

"What a shame to make fun of the poor old thing," said Mollie, patting her. "Come, Eton Girl, here's a nice piece of cake to comfort you."

"Not a very attractive object, is she," said Peter, "when she comes 'fawning to be fed' like that? The old sycophant."

"'Lickophant' would be a more appropriate term, I should think, for an animal with such a . . . such a lambent tongue," suggested one of the Civil Service youths shyly; and then looked as though he wished

he hadn't spoken, for Mollie—who did not always see jokes—insisted on repeating his remark for 'A's' benefit, together with the ingenuous comment, "Isn't he clever?" at which the youth's embarrassed confusion became worse confounded.

"They're talkin' about gettin' up another Gymkhana next month," said Anstruther presently as he balanced a lump of sugar on the broad nose of the old spaniel, whose round bulging eyes goggled greedily. "And I hope," looking at Mollie, "you'll do the Ladies' Event with me as usual, will you?"

But Mollie had already made up her mind, and, true to her determination to see less of Anstruther for the future, answered without a moment's hesitation—

"Oh, thanks very much, 'A,' but I was thinking," with a charming smile in Peter's direction, "of asking Mr Dare."

And it was not until Peter was actually on his way home that he remembered how he had fully intended inviting Phillis to take part with him in this same Gymkhana.

In spite of the fact that he was flattered at Mrs Curtis's asking him to be her partner—an invitation he had, on the spur of the moment, without thinking twice about it, joyfully accepted—he felt that he would far rather have entered for the Ladies' Event with his old playmate. She was a stranger too; knew no one in Ghazipur, and perhaps now wouldn't go in for it at all.

What an ass he had been!

CHAPTER IV.

“The old order changeth. . . .”

ONE day, later in the week, it was Peter's turn to be Orderly Officer. Owing to the fact that it entails staying in the whole day long, this dreary and oft-recurring duty is little loved among subalterns.

The ‘Orderly Dog’—so called, presumably, because every dog has his day—is not allowed to leave the Lines during his tour of duty—an irksome restriction under any circumstances, but in India on a polo day, wellnigh intolerable.

Hitherto it had always been the custom in the Westshires, when the subaltern of the day wanted to play polo, to allow the Sergeant Major to answer for him between the hours of four and six; but under the *régime* of the new C.O., such a ‘flagrant dereliction of duty,’ as he called it, was speedily put a stop to.

Peter's duties as ‘Orderly Dog’ were many and various. Having superintended the issue of rations weighed the meat, examined the potatoes, and tasted the bread, he next took part in the morning parade; after which he first of all inspected and dismissed the guards that had been mounted the day before, and then started off to go round the men's breakfasts.

The Barracks were scattered over a very considerable area, so this latter duty he performed on horseback.

As he came to each block of buildings—which though outwardly of no very pleasing or artistic design, were yet sufficiently comfortable and roomy, affording ample accommodation for a Company, with its own wash-house and cook-house complete—he dismounted and went in to the dining-hall where the men were all seated at table.

His appearance was greeted by the word of command ‘tshun. Orderly Officer,’ shouted by the sergeant in charge.

Whereupon Peter asked the time-honoured question, ‘Any complaints?’ to which was returned the almost invariable reply, ‘None, sir.’ And away he went, as fast as his pony’s twinkling legs could carry him over the grass to the next Company.

Occasionally the men would complain to the Orderly Officer that ‘the potatoes was that green and hard you couldn’t eat ‘em’; or there would be an outcry at the amount of bone served out to them with their meat. But all such defects would be speedily rectified by the Quartermaster, and peace and contentment would reign once more.

“Taken all round,” thought Peter as he rode away, “the life of a private soldier is by no means an unenviable one. The lucky beggar is entirely free from all worries and anxieties—and precious few of the toiling community, or of any other community for that matter, can say as much. His food is given him, he is provided with clothes, he has money to spend, a house to live in, to say nothing of all the extra comforts, luxuries indeed, that are furnished regimentally for his benefit—

the reading-rooms, libraries, supper-bars, billiard-rooms, &c., &c. Really, if he got no pay at all, he would still be well-to-do, but as it is, he is a jolly sight better off than I am, for instance! Why, every single penny he draws is money he can spend—waste—throw away—if he likes, and be none the worse off materially. In fact, he can eat his cake and have it too! Many a man with a large income, and a still larger expenditure, with never a blessed halfpenny to spare, is a pauper compared with the private soldier.”

After his long pilgrimage round the *Compan es* Peter made his way to the Mess.

Sitting on the verandah, reading the paper, and looking very cross and unapproachable, was Denison. On seeing his subaltern he cried out—

“Look at this. It’s an infernal shame,” and he held out the paper.

Peter took it, and in the *Gazette*, under the heading *Westshire Regiment*, read, “‘Lieutenant N. W. Grant from the *Jamaica Rifles*, to be Captain.’ . . . What does it mean?” he gasped.

“Mean,” replied Denison with indescribable disgust, “why, it means that this fella Grant has been gazetted to us. They’ve disbanded his regiment and must find a place somewhere for the officers, I suppose. It’s deuced bad luck our getting *this* chap, though. I know the blighter—met him once in the *West Indies*. Worst type of bounder. Fancies himself with women. Went by the name of the ‘*Amorous Ape*.’ How you’ll all hate him.”

“Then,” said Peter dully, still looking at the paper, scarcely able to believe his eyes, “then I don’t get my step after all . . . is that what it means?”

"Afraid so, old boy. It's awful bad luck. I'm devilish sorry. Such a brute of a chap too, this fella—makes it all the worse. But you needn't look quite so funereal about it," he added, putting his hand on Peter's shoulder, "your promotion's not postponed indefinitely, you know, it's bound to come very soon now."

At that moment the tall figure of Major Anstruther appeared in the doorway.

"Hulloa, you fellas," he said, with a laugh, coming towards them, a bundle of letters in his hand, "what devilment are you up to, plotting together out here, with faces a yard long? Now then, out with it, Denny, what's the latest?"

"It's no laughing matter, 'A,' we've had a bounder brought in from this disbanded Jamaica Regiment."

"No, really? What's his rank?" asked Anstruther.

"He comes to us as junior captain."

"Well, that doesn't affect you, Denny, my son, does it?"

"No, but the man's an awful cad. Besides, it hits Dare, who's been Senior Subaltern for ever so long . . . does him out of his step, you know."

"Well, kick the demned fella out again," said Anstruther the lawless. "Why, when I was out here before, whenever we got a fella gazetted to us we didn't like, we just used to make a 'tiger' of him, and he jolly soon used to clear out, I can tell you."

"What do you mean, 'A,'" inquired Denison, "by 'making a tiger of him'?"

"Why, don't you know that much, Denny? Lord, what ignorance! It's quite a simple process, but most effectual. Here's the recipe for it," and his eyes

twinkled as he seated himself in one of the long chairs, and lit a cheroot. "The small hours of the morning are the most suitable for this interesting experiment, which should usually, when possible, be carried out after a big guest night. Select the victim, whom we will presume you are desirous of encouraging to seek 'fresh fields and pastures new,' eh, Denny . . .?"

Denison nodded.

"Then remove clothing, stripe with broad streaks of mustard and ink from head to foot, and hunt bare-foot through the station. The pursuers, or the larger number of them, will of course be mounted. You will find it better *not* to take hog-spears . . . hunting-crops, perhaps. . . ."

"What a savage you are, 'A,'" said Denison, laughing. "I wonder what the authorities would say to such doings nowadays!"

"The only way, my dear fella, the only way to keep your regiment clean and fit to live in . . . uncontaminated. . . ."

"We should all be fired out next day," said Denison. "That's all we should gain by it. No," he added, shaking his head dolefully, "I don't think such heroic measures will be of any use in this case. Besides, this chap's a captain: perhaps he may have improved since I knew him. Possibly he's been licked into shape by now . . . but I doubt it."

"You young fellas," drawled Anstruther, "have no spirit — no dash — no ginger;" and he turned his attention to the pile of English letters he was carrying in his hand.

"Anyhow, it's a pretty good slur on me, Denny," said Peter, gloomy and resentful, "being passed over like this."

"Rubbish! It isn't that you're passed over. It's simply that they've got to find places somewhere for these disbanded men; and it's just bad luck our getting one of 'em. Look at the Gazette—it's full of their names. We are by no means the only sufferers."

"Denny, oh Denny, this is lovely," cried Anstruther—who was reading one of his home letters—suddenly convulsed with laughter. "It appears that our new Colonel, whom you don't know as well as I do . . . yet," with a significant glance, "went to dine with the other battalion at Aldershot just before coming out to us. And old Vaughan—merry old boy Vaughan, best of good chaps—stuffed him with the most awful yarns about India, and very nearly succeeded in frightening him into refusing the command . . . wish he had quite," *sotto voce*. "Old Punch—I beg his pardon—I mean the Colonel, has done all his soldiering at home, you know, and looks upon India as a savage, dangerous country—full of cholera and snakes—where no white man's life is safe for a moment. Well, at dinner, he asked Vaughan if it were true that an officer had recently been shot dead in broad daylight at Ghazipur, the very place where the regiment was stationed. Vaughan told him it was true enough. Poor old Holden it was, who commanded the Native Cavalry. You remember, don't you, Denny?"

"Yes, of course I remember," said Denison. "It happened at the races. I saw it myself. A Ghazi killed him—one of those fanatic tribesmen, you know," turning to Peter, "who come over the border to kill an unbeliever and gain Paradise. Colonel Holden was standing near our tent talking to a lady, when suddenly there was a bang, and over he fell . . . dead. The

murderer was collared, of course, and executed. But that's only part of the programme—suits his book exactly, providing him with a free pass to the Happy Hunting-grounds, or whatever is their equivalent in the Pathan mind."

"Bah!" said 'A.' "In the good old days they used to hang the brutes in a pig's skin when they played those sort of tricks. That put a stop to the practice, I can tell you."

"Why a pig's skin?" asked Peter.

"Well, the skin of the unclean pig is supposed to defile the soul as it leaves the body, and to make sure of its damnation."

"A jolly good thing too, I should think, sir," said Peter.

"That method of dealing with them has been abolished long ago," said Denison. "It was ruled by the authorities at home to be 'un-Christian'!" Anstruther snorted.

"I should like," he said, "to make the blighters who were responsible for that ruling come out and live in Ghazipur—or any other Frontier-Station, for that matter. It would jolly soon teach 'em. Well, they fairly rubbed it into the Colonel apparently, at Aldershot. Vaughan told him . . . let's see, where is it?" running his eye over the letter as he spoke. "Oh, yes . . . here's his description of the conversation . . ." And he read aloud, "'Of course, in a place like Ghazipur, no one,' I told him, 'ever dreams of sleeping in his bed.' 'Why not?' asked Punch. 'Quite out of the question,' I answered; 'you have to put a dummy in your bed, and sleep on the roof.' To see Punch's face was as good as a play. 'A dummy?' he stammered. 'Yes,' I said firmly, 'then, when in the middle of the night the wily

Ghazi comes along, he contents himself with stabbing the figure in the bed—imagines he has bagged a fine colonel, you know, and will certainly get a front seat in Paradise; whilst you, safely asleep on the roof, are none the worse. You'll be quite all right up there, except for the snakes . . . and centipedes . . . and scorpions.' Punch's jaw dropped . . .” Anstruther broke off suddenly, “I'm just reading what's in my letter, you know. . . . No disrespect to the Colonel, of course, eh? you insubordinate young devil,” he said, with a twinkle in his eye, turning upon Peter. “What are you laughing at?”

“Oh, at the dummy, of course, sir; not . . . not the Colonel.”

“That's all right, then. . . . What else does the beggar say—writes such an infernal hand. Ah, here it is . . . ‘P.'s jaw dropped, and he asked dismally, Do many murders of this kind—of this brutal, cold-blooded kind—occur in the Stations on the Frontier?’ ‘Quantities,’ I replied, ‘and curiously enough, it's mostly colonels commanding regiments they go for. They look upon 'em as what in their own country they would call Headmen, and think that they acquire very special merit in bagging them.’ . . . Now don't you make any mistake, you boys,” Anstruther went on, when their laughter had subsided; “you'll have to mind your Ps and Qs with the new C.O., I can tell you. He imagines he's been sent here specially to ‘wheel us into line’; which being interpreted means, according to him, to make things as unpleasant as possible all round. I took jolly good care to get my year's leave sanctioned before he arrived, for fear he should take it into his head to put a spoke in my wheel.”

"Will he approve of polo and encourage it, do you think?" asked Peter anxiously, knowing how largely sport in regiments is dependent on the idiosyncrasies of commanding officers.

"Encourage it?" echoed Anstruther derisively. "Not much! Forbid it, more likely. He ain't got any sport-in' instincts, and you'll find will have a very special 'down' on the polo-team from the first."

"But why?" protested Peter. "What harm . . .?"

"No harm," replied Anstruther; "on the contrary, lots of good. But," shrugging his shoulders, "there it is. You mark my words, he'll always put difficulties in the way of your going anywhere to play in polo tournaments. It's so easy to say you can't be spared, you know. He will hardly try to stop our playin' in the tournament here, I suppose? By the way, what's the date of it, Dare?"

"About the middle of January, sir . . . date not fixed yet."

"It will probably be my last appearance in a tournament," said Anstruther. "I doubt very much if I ought really to be playing this time; I'm getting old and slow—*anno domini*, you know, that's what's the matter with me—slow on the ball, and stiff with my near-side backhanders," and he sighed deeply, as he stretched a lean, strong arm over his head, and brought it down with a circular sweep past his left side, as though hitting at a ball with an imaginary polo-stick.

"Not a bit of it, sir," protested Peter, who they all said was far and away the best player in the regiment. "We always go to pieces when you are not playing for us—you keep us together. Besides, you didn't show any signs of being slow on the ball yesterday; or stiff either, for that matter."

"Ah, Dare, Dare," said Anstruther with a laugh, "that was only in a rotten practice game. It's a very different thing in a tournament—*then*, old muscles and stiff joints find you out, I can tell you," and he sighed again for his lost prowess at this king of games that he loved so well.

In his day he had been one of the most brilliant polo players in the Army, and even now was still a tower of strength to his side. A hard rider, a sure hitter, always well mounted and in good condition, he played a steady, reliable game at 'Back,' and was often the means of staving off defeat when the younger members of his team had become 'rattled,' and victory for their opponents seemed assured.

"How are the ponies, Dare?" he asked presently. "I hope there'll be no more casualties among 'em; we've none too many 'fliers' as it is, and if any of 'em should take it into their silly heads to go lame, we should be in an awful 'hat'!"

"Oh, they're pretty fit, Major, I think," said Peter. "I saw all sixteen of them trotted this morning. My bay country-bred, 'Frog,' you know, is still going a shade tender on his off fore, where he got that knock, but it's nothing to worry about; and your Apollyon seemed to be a little bit stiff on his old spavin at starting, but that always wears off very soon, of course; and the others were all quite sound as far as I could tell."

"That's right," said Anstruther. "We've got quite a good lot on the whole, I think—of course, it's no use pretending there's no 'tail.' Those two old club ponies, for instance, and Platt's mare, have no right to be playing in tournaments at their time of life."

"I suppose not," agreed Peter reluctantly. "But they're all three so extraordinarily quick and handy, you know, sir, and they suit old Platitude down to the ground; I don't think he can manage anything that takes very much riding, and those three old fossils know enough to play the whole tournament by themselves."

"Um," commented Anstruther doubtfully. "And that wonderful English pony of yours that I hear so much about?" he continued, chaffing Peter in his good-natured way. "I hope *he's* all right!"

"Oh, Lucifer's splendid, thanks," said Peter, with the legitimate pride of an owner in the possession of an animal he looks upon as quite 'in a class by itself.'

"Wish we had you at 'Two,' Denny old boy, as we used to before that rotten war," said Anstruther, getting up.

"Oh, don't go, 'A,'" returned Denison. "I like hearing about the polo even though I can't play nowadays."

"One minute, old man, I must just go and write a note."

"Now there's a man," said Denison, his eyes following the tall, khaki-clad figure, "whom any one would be glad to serve under, in peace or war. I wish to goodness *he* had got command. The men think no end of him, and the officers. . . ."

"Yes," replied Peter, "he's a man, you see, and of course that goes a long way. Some C.O.s. are old women, and then every one despises 'em. Our new Colonel . . . well, we don't know *what* he is yet. Anyway, he's not much to look at—not in the same street with Anstruther. . . ."

"Look here, young man," interrupted Denison, "don't you get into the habit of laying down the law so much about your seniors. Fancy your daring," he went on with indignation that was more than half-feigned, "to make disparaging comments on your C.O.'s personal appearance—disgraceful—scandalous."

"Oh, go on, Denny, you know he's an awful monstrosity," said Peter laughing. Then he added mischievously, "I'm quite sure you would never wish me to say anything that wasn't strictly true, Denny. Honestly now, did you ever see such a figure of fun in your life—all body and no legs, like a seal."

"Shut up, Peter, I won't have it. You'll get yourself into trouble some day. Remember, you're no longer an irresponsible child. You *must* be more guarded in what you say. You don't seem to realise in the very least what a serious offence insubordination is—our whole system would go to pieces at once if the law that punishes it were not rigorously enforced. Every officer, a day or even an hour senior to you, is theoretically your superior in every way. Under *no* circumstances can it ever be right or fitting for you to criticise anything your C.O. does, or says, or thinks, or feels—and certainly not his personal appearance. Seriously, old chap, I mean it."

"Righto, my dear old preacher, I'll reform," replied Peter, not meaning it in the very least.

Just then, an orderly came up to the Mess verandah, and halting in front of Denison, saluted and said—

"The Adjutant's compliments, sir, the Commanding Officer would like to see you at the Orderly Room. And I was to give you this, sir," handing him, as he spoke, a long envelope.

"All right," replied Denison, taking the envelope and tearing it open. "I'll come at once."

He half rose from his chair, but as his eyes fell on the closely-written sheet of foolscap which he had by this time unfolded, he sat down again. There was silence for a time, during which Peter leant back comfortably, swinging his long legs over the arm of his chair, and whistling under his breath an air from Lohengrin, whilst he mentally reviewed the situation.

He was done out of his step—there was no getting over that. And Denny had said his supplanter was a cad—that made it all the worse. He wondered if they couldn't find some way of making it too hot for the new-comer in the regiment . . . they didn't want any bounders in the Westshires—why the deuce couldn't he go to the Cavalry! How he had been counting on that step, too! More than once lately, in the course of distressing interviews with his anxious creditors, his solemn assurances that there was every prospect of his immediate promotion to the rank of captain had alone stood between him and ruin—had alone prevented them from what they were pleased to call 'taking action.' Still, if only he could be sure that Stella would win her race, and if only. . . .

He was interrupted in his reverie by an exclamation from Denison, and looking across towards him saw that as he read his face was 'agitated by some strong emotion—emotions rather, for anger, disappointment, contempt, and apprehension, all struggled there for mastery; and although each in turn appeared to win the day, they were eventually, one and all, put to flight by mirth, uncontrollable mirth.

"You young idiot!" he said at length, when he had

recovered his gravity, pronouncing the words with great solemnity, "what's this you've been up to at the railway station?"

"The railway station?" inquired Peter innocently.

"Yes. Last Friday night. You must be mad. . . ."

"Oh, that," said Peter nonchalantly. "That's all right; I apologised to the old buster—Major Black, he said his name was, of the Royal Indian Medical Department; a very suitable name, too, since he was as black as your boot. Surely," he went on in a voice of righteous indignation, "you don't mean to tell me that after all he's going to cut up rough and report it, and make a fuss?"

"He *has* reported it—look at this," replied Denison, holding out the papers. "We've both got to go to the Orderly Room about it immediately. The Colonel's furious. He's sent the report to me as you're in my Company—with orders to investigate at once, and let him know what you have got to say about it. Now then, what have you got to say?"

"What an old brute Major Black must be!" cried Peter, "to run me in after I apologised."

"Don't talk nonsense, you young idiot—this is serious. Tell me exactly what happened; everything, mind."

"Righto," replied Peter coolly. "It was nothing very much after all. Several of us were at the railway station after dinner, seeing off those fellas in the Fourth who were going down to Bombay—to buy ponies, you know. And whilst we were hanging about waiting for their train to start, I happened to go and look into one of the other carriages, and there I saw what I thought—what I honestly thought, mind you, Denny—was a fat Bengali babu lying asleep, and

snoring fit to wake the dead. He had an enormous nose, and it was sticking up just beside the window of the carriage, blowing away like a fog-horn. So I just leant across and gave it a good tweak to make him mend his manners. You should have seen him jump. . . .”

Here the recollection and the droll recital of this ridiculous incident were too much for them, and they both lay back in their chairs and roared with laughter. Denison was the first to recover.

“Very funny, of course,” he said as severely as he could, “but you’ve succeeded in landing yourself in a very pretty mess, you young Juggins. Anything more?”

“Well, all the rest, I’m sure you will agree, is entirely in my favour,” replied Peter, still bubbling over with suppressed merriment. “I went back to where the other fellas were, and was standing talking to them quietly when suddenly we were confronted by an apparition that might well have appalled the stoutest heart. . . .”

“Will you kindly be serious, Dare, if you please.”

“Very good, sir;” then continuing his story, still with an irrepressible twinkle in his eye, he described the apparition. “The figure that stood before me was clad in pyjamas of a very striking design, red slippers, and a uniform cap with a gold peak.”

Denison did not smile.

“No exaggeration or embroidery, please,” he said coldly, with difficulty repressing a desire to give way once more to demoralising laughter.

“No embroidery whatever, sir,—except on the cap,” was the solemn reply. There was a pause for a

moment, then Peter went on. "This individual demanded loudly which of us had pulled his nose. He was extremely indignant, and used very violent language, telling us of all the extremely unpleasant things he was going to do to us, and at the same time informing us, and everybody else who happened to be on the platform, that he was Major Black of the Royal Indian Medical Department. When I made the . . . er . . . er . . . appalling discovery that it was not the nose of a babu I had pulled, but the sacred beak of a senior officer, I at once apologised profusely. I said everything abject I could think of, really I did, Denny. That I regretted exceedingly—that I was very sorry indeed—and finally, by way of explanation, I told him . . . though I have since thought that I may possibly have been wrong in doing so . . . and that perhaps the excuse I gave was more . . . more unforgivable than the . . . er . . . assault itself, I told him . . . that . . . that—well—I just told him the truth," with a rueful laugh at his own want of tact, "that I had mistaken him for—a babu."

"You didn't!" cried Denison, abandoning all attempt at preserving his gravity. "Oh, Peter, Peter, you're impossible. You'll get fired out one of these days, if you're not careful; see if you don't."

The scene in the Orderly Room a little later, when the delinquent was marched in for his wiggling—'haled before the beak,' as he described it afterwards, with irreverent reference to the colonel's gigantic nose—was truly awe-inspiring.

Behind a large table littered with papers sat Punch

enthroned in the seat of Justice—panoplied with power—overbearing, tyrannical, his ragged moustache bristling with indignation.

For a brief space there was silence—presage of the storm.

Peter stood before him, strictly to 'attention,' tall and erect, every line of his figure instinct with that unmistakable air of breeding so bitterly resented of the common herd, whilst a faint, could it be a contemptuous, smile hovered about his lips.

Standing there, he experienced a curious feeling of detachment from his surroundings, as though he were merely a looker-on at the performance of some weird rite or ceremony that was about to be celebrated by this strange high-priest, instead of, as was the case, being himself the victim awaiting immolation.

At length, choking with wrath, the Colonel found his voice, and in raucous tones—harsh and discordant as those, thought insubordinate Peter, of a cracked cornet—blared out—

"What . . . what do you mean by this disgraceful conduct, sir?"

Peter, his ears offended, his teeth set on edge, instinctively closed his eyes, wincing at the horrid sound, whilst his thoughts, ever unruly and ill-disciplined, busied themselves with the idea of the cracked cornet. Would the 'Society for the suppression of solo cornet players,' he wondered dreamily, look upon this performance as coming within their jurisdiction?

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself, Mr Dare?" went on the brazen voice more loudly still. "Can't you hear me? Have you nothing to say in your defence?"

Peter roused himself.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said, his cool, level tones driving Punch frantic. "I mistook Major . . . er . . . Black for . . . er . . . for a babu. I told him so at the time, and apologised. I understood the matter had ended there."

"Oh, you did, did you?" bawled Punch. "Then, you're very much mistaken, let me tell you. End there, indeed! I suppose you think you can go about the country pulling senior officers' noses with impunity!"

"I explained, sir, that I mistook——"

"Explained, sir," echoed the colonel in loud derision, "a pretty tale! I tell you I won't have it—I won't have it—I won't have it," and his voice rose higher and higher at each repetition of the words, till it sounded like the long-drawn-out and agonising crescendo of a steam siren, and it was all Peter could do to refrain from putting his fingers in his ears to shut out the agonising sound. "What do you mean by standing there making faces at me, sir—got St Vitus's Dance?" went on Punch, glaring ferociously. "I would have you to know, sir, that I won't keep officers who can't behave themselves in *my* regiment. . . ."

"*My* regiment, indeed!" thought Peter, scornfully deriding the use of the sacred possessive by an inter-loper such as this.

"I won't keep 'em," shouted Punch, continuing the harangue, "clearly understand that. For the very next offence, out you go, young man—neck and crop, sir, neck and crop," and he thumped the table with a clumsy fist, upsetting the ink in his excitement.

Peter, with an effort, controlled himself, forcing back the words that sprang to his lips. After all, it didn't

matter much what the monster said. Of course, he couldn't carry out his ridiculous threats—there was no fear of that. He had heard of C.O.s like this before—under-bred bounders, who, 'armed with a little brief authority,' took the greatest delight in bullying and browbeating their subordinates on every possible occasion. Of course it never paid to fight the C.O., he knew *that*—it was never anything like 'good enough.' Consequently when the command of a regiment happened to devolve upon an individual who was unsuited, either mentally, morally, or physically, to the performance of so responsible and difficult a duty, there was practically no redress for the officers who had the misfortune to serve under him. Were he bounder, bully, or merely fool, there was but one course open to them—submission. At the same time, there was nothing to prevent their solacing themselves with the thought that the period of command did not last for ever, and that possibly they might have 'better luck next time.'

Peter was sentenced, on this particular occasion—after much threatening and bluster on the part of his judge—to send immediately an ample and comprehensive apology in writing to the swarthy doctor whom he had assaulted.

Talking about it later to Denison, who told him he had got off uncommon cheap, he said bitterly—

"Of course it's not the sentence I object to in the very least; that's nothing at all. But it's his method of awarding it—his insufferable remarks. In no other walk of life would he have dared to speak to me like that. Do you imagine, for a moment, that such a state of affairs would be tolerated anywhere except in the Service? If we hadn't both happened to be in the Army,

why, I should have jolly well knocked him down; but just because the little monstrosity is a great deal senior to me—which, after all, only means a lot older, and, for that reason alone, probably more inefficient, physically anyway . . .”

“Dry up, you young Juggins. What’s the good of talking a lot of insubordinate rot like that. He’s your C.O., and you’ve just got to put up with anything he may say to you, so there’s an end of it.”

“Yes, but there are ways and ways of doing things, and this blighter . . .”

“Well, I shouldn’t worry about him, if I were you. He won’t last for ever. But just you be careful now, young-fella-my-lad, and don’t give him another chance of ‘getting his knife’ into you—that’s all.”

“One is so helpless . . .” protested Peter, with impotent wrath.

“Yes, that’s just it exactly,” was the reply. “Once you fully realise that, it will be all plain sailing. It’s not the very smallest use, you know, you trying to ‘kick against the pricks.’”

“Did you ever hear, Denny,” said Peter, brightening up a little, “what they did in one of the native regiments—the Moradabad Light Infantry, I believe it was—with a C.O. they hated?”

“N-no,” said Denison.

“Well, the man was an awful brute, a bullying bounder of the worst type, violent and intolerable—drove them all to desperation. So they persuaded their doctor—it happened a good long time ago, you know—to put him ‘under observation’ as a ‘loony.’”

“Oh, rot!”

“No, it’s quite true. The C.O. was furious, as you

can imagine; in such a state of frenzy, indeed, that he really was almost 'balmy' for a time. And, so well was the whole thing engineered, that in the end he was actually deposed and shipped off to 'Funny House.'"

"Nonsense, Peter," said Denison, laughing involuntarily. "I don't believe a word of it; you invented the whole yarn."

"No, really, I heard it, Denny. I say . . . couldn't we do something of the same——"

"Shut up! When *will* you learn the rudiments of discipline? Do you at all realise, I wonder, that you render yourself liable to be 'run-in' and tried by Court Martial for Mutiny?"

"Rats! I don't believe that's Mutiny, Denny."

"Of course it is. Just look in that fat red book on the table over there," said Denison, pointing towards a bulky volume that bore the title, 'Manual of Military Law.'

"I don't know in the least where to look," confessed Peter, bringing the big book over to Denison, and laying it down beside him. "You find it for me."

"What an ignorant young devil you are; it's your duty to know all about it. Look at this," he said, a few moments later, "here's the definition of Mutiny for you," and he read—"The term Mutiny implies collective insubordination; the combination of two or more persons to resist, or to induce others to resist, Lawful Military Authority.' That's exactly what you're trying to do, you young criminal, you're trying to induce others—that's me—to resist lawful military authority—that's the Colonel. A clear case of Mutiny."

"And the punishment?" asked Peter, rather impressed at the magnitude of his misdoing.

"The punishment? Ah, that's farther on in the book, somewhere—wait a minute till I find it," rapidly turning over the leaves as he spoke. Soon he found the place, and read—"Every person subject to Military Law who commits any of the following offences—that is to say, causes or conspires with any other person to cause any Mutiny, &c. . . . shall on conviction by Court Martial be liable to suffer death, or such less punishment as is in this Act mentioned.'"

"Oh, that's only on Active Service, Denny, surely?"

"Not a bit of it—at *all* times. Let it be a warning to you. Seriously, old man, you'll get yourself into hot water if you don't take a pull. Don't be always saying silly, insubordinate things; it's not particularly clever or amusing, and will some day land you in difficulties."

"Righto, thanks, Denny. I'll be frightfully careful in future. It certainly *would* be rather a sell to find oneself, one fine day, condemned to suffer 'death or such less punishment as is in this Act mentioned.' Lor!"

CHAPTER V.

“Lead we not here a jolly life
Betwixt the shine and shade?”

NEXT Sunday, after lunch, as they sat in the Mess verandah, smoking and looking at the English papers, Peter yawning said to his ‘Skipper’—

“Don’t forget we’ve got to go to a tea-fight at the Cumberledges’ to-day.”

“Oh, have we?” replied Denison drowsily. “Will you drive me?”

“Righto. About half-past four? You won’t want to stay very long, will you?”

“N-no. I don’t suppose so. But where’s the hurry?”

Peter looked a little self-conscious.

“Oh, no hurry, of course, only I’m going for a run in the car—the Curtis’s car, you know—before dinner.”

“I see,” said Denison drily, and added, “Well now I must be off to the bungalow—got a lot of letters to write. Are you coming?”

“Yes, I suppose I may as well. I’ve looked at these papers till I’m tired; besides, I want to go and see the ponies.”

Upon which they left the Mess, and strolled through the brilliant sunshine towards their house, the grey thatched roof of which was visible through the trees.

Later in the afternoon, looking superlatively smart in their best 'store' clothes, which did credit to the skill of one of the best, and certainly the most ruinous, of London tailors, they drove off in Peter's high, red-wheeled dog-cart to the Commissioner's.

As they sped along over the smooth carefully watered roads, their rubber-tyred wheels making no sound, the sleepy peaceful stillness of the afternoon—broken only by the click-click of Peggy's hoofs, the distant murmur of doves, and the monotonous moan of the water-wheels, each turned by a pair of patient blindfolded bullocks—sank into their souls and kept them silent.

Slender, graceful bamboo trees of every shade of feathery green swayed idly by the roadside. Far away over the fields there hung a faint haze, through which shimmered the darker green of mango groves; whilst everywhere the golden sunlight shone brightly through the quivering transparent leaves, and cast broad bands of flickering light and shade across the yellow road.

"Jolly peaceful, slumberous feeling there is in the air, isn't there?" said Denison at length.

"Delicious," replied Peter. "It makes one think of those ripping lines about 'some green afternoon' that 'turns towards sunset and is loath to die.' Beautiful idea, isn't it, Denny?"

"Rot!" said Denison, who did not altogether approve of his subaltern's fondness for poetry. "How can an afternoon turn? It's not a live thing such as a pony like Peggy, or a donkey like you. You waste too much of your time reading that sort of rubbish; try a little Military History for a change."

"Goth! Philistine! Vandal!" laughed Peter "Of

course I know jolly well you don't mean what you say. You appreciate a beautiful line as much as any one. It's no use pretending you don't."

"Nonsense! Look after the mare or she'll have us in the ditch. Here's the gate. *Je-rusalem*," he ejaculated, as they spun round off the main road into the drive, "what a way to take a corner, you young devil! Why, we were on one wheel for nearly ten yards. Do you want to break my neck?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Peter, "we shan't come to any harm. Old Peggy's always a bit sharp with her corners. Doesn't she fizz along, the old beauty? Did you ever sit behind a faster trotter?"

"She certainly is a very good goer, but I should think you would soon knock her legs to pieces, stamping along the roads at this pace."

"Not a bit of it; they're as hard as iron."

"What, the roads?"

"No, her legs, of course. Not a blemish either. She's a wonder. Whoa, old girl! here we are. Jump out quick, old chap, will you? she doesn't like standing."

"It doesn't require a clairvoyant to see that," said Denison, as, seizing a favourable opportunity, he sprang from the swaying trap to the welcome safety of the gravel drive beneath.

Peter joined him, and after giving a few directions to the syce, and patting the mare's arching neck, walked with him slowly up the broad flight of steps to the big entrance.

When they reached the top they turned for a moment to watch old Peggy being led away, foaming and snorting, and tossing her game little head, as though to protest against the indignity of this enforced idleness.

"Be sure you remember to inquire after the Commissioner's health, Denny; he's in bed with gout, you know, and Mrs Cumberledge will enjoy telling you all about it," said Peter as they crossed the big hall in the wake of one of the scarlet-clad servants.

"All right. By the way, which is the old lady's best ear? I couldn't make her hear at all last time I met her."

"Her right ear is the better of the two, but that isn't saying very much; you'll have to shout."

The big drawing-room was looking cool and restful; large bowls of exquisite, freshly gathered roses—in the arrangement of which Peter thought he recognised Phillis's hand—sweetened the air, making poor exiles think of home.

They found quite a number of people having tea in a recess at the far end of the room, near an open window, through which there was a delightful view of the beautiful grounds spread out green and tranquil below. At their approach their hostess rose from her seat beside the tea-table, beaming a welcome.

"How-do-you-do," they shouted; "how is Mr Cumberledge?"

The dear old lady, in the curiously soft voice of the very deaf, replied that she was afraid he was not so well again; and, she went on, to add to their troubles, one of the carriage horses—a very old friend and great pet, whose name was Duke—had trodden on a nail or something the day before, and was on the sick-list too. . . . Not very bad . . . no . . . but they couldn't have the carriage out . . . such a nuisance; and she made room for Major Denison on the sofa beside her.

"Come and sit near me," she said to him, "and Phillis, dear child, tell them to bring some fresh tea, will you?"

Phillis, looking very sweet and dainty in a white frock, crossed the room to give the required order, and then came over to where Peter was sitting helplessly by—and at the mercy of—his pet aversion, a certain Mrs Kelly.

On his arrival he had been immediately appropriated by this masterful and acid lady, who was known throughout the station as 'P.K.'—short for Poisonous Kelly—a sobriquet which, although not of a very charitable nature, was at least thoroughly well deserved; and he was now engaged in listening to a voluble account of the delinquencies of Indian servants in general, and of her own in particular.

"As I was just telling Mr Dare, Miss Montague, native servants are for ever doing the most appalling things—whether from vice or from sheer stupidity I can't make up my mind. This very afternoon, for instance, I told my ayah, who has been with me for years and years, that I wanted to wear a smart frock, as I was going out to tea. So what do you think the old idiot did?—she actually laid out my best pink satin evening gown, and all my jewellery. But that is nothing to what they *can* do," she went on, having paused sufficiently long to allow her audience to appreciate the enormity of the ayah's conduct. "The other night we had a dinner-party—all the big-wigs in the place. It was the first opportunity my new cook—who had come to me with superlatively good recommendations—had had of distinguishing himself. He didn't let it slip either—the wretch! Surely, thought I, as the soup-plates were placed on the

table, the soup seems to be a very queer colour, and my heart sank. Then I tasted it. . . ." The face of disgust that she reproduced for their benefit was most realistic. "It wasn't soup at all; it was, what do you think? You'll never guess—why, coffee!"

"Splendid, splendid!" laughed Peter; "and did he give you soup in your coffee-cups after dinner?"

"I can assure you it is no laughing matter, Mr Dare," returned P.K. dolefully. "I was never so ashamed in my life."

"Oh, I shouldn't bother about a little thing like that, if I were you," said Peter cheerfully; "it's not a quarter as bad as the fine old crusted Indian story that we are all told when we first come out."

"What's that?" broke in Phillis eagerly.

"Never mind, young lady," he replied. "It's rather horrible."

"Oh, you must tell us. Isn't it mean of him, Mrs Kelly?"

"Well, your blood be upon your own head then. Mrs Kelly has probably heard it before. Once upon a time," he began solemnly, "a certain bachelor gave a dinner-party, at which the coffee was so extraordinarily good that all the ladies wanted to know how it was made. So he called up his old bearer, and asked him to explain to them the process. The old native, brimming over with pride, minutely described the initial stages, and wound up by saying with sweet simplicity—'and afterwards straining through master's sock.' Then, seeing the horror depicted on his listeners' faces, and mistaking the cause, he hastened to protest, with virtuous indignation, 'not master's clean sock—master's dirty sock.'"

"Oh, Peter, you horrid boy," cried Phillis, "what a disgusting story—how could you tell me!"

"Well, you brought it on yourself. It's not my fault; besides, I believe it is perfectly true," laughed Peter unrepentant.

Just then there was a general lull in the conversation, as a late arrival,—no less a personage than Mr Alexander Platt of the Westshires,—hot and embarrassed, stumped up the room to pay his respects.

"How-do-you-do, Mrs Cumberledge," he said with his best bow, in a shy, subdued voice, painfully conscious that every one in the room was looking at him; "how is Mr Cumberledge?"

Now, for some reason or another, possibly because the lameness of the horse Duke had formed one of the chief topics of conversation during the afternoon, the old lady thought he was making inquiries after that animal's health, and replied in her soft, deaf voice, which was nevertheless audible all over the room—

"Oh, he's getting on nicely, thank you. We stood him out all night in the garden with his foot in a bucket of water, and to-day he is really much better."

Platt's face was a study.

"Bucket of water . . . the . . . the Commissioner?" he stammered, aghast.

Then a gust of laughter swept the room, followed by explanations and apologies.

Dear old buxom Mrs Cumberledge, who had thoroughly enjoyed the joke, laughed more than any one as she pictured to herself her irascible spouse standing all night long in the garden, with his cherished gouty foot immersed in a bucket of water.

Peter was the first to make a move. It annoyed him,

somehow, to find that nearly every one else was staying on for music. Even Denison, when asked if he was ready to go, announced his intention of coming on later with Platt. He began to wish he could stay too. He wasn't nearly so keen now on that run in the motor he had looked forward to so eagerly, especially when he saw that Phillis was really disappointed at his going. He wanted to hear her play too, and . . . how jolly nice she looked in that white frock!

Altogether it was a far from jubilant, indeed almost a disconsolate, young man who took his departure and went off reluctantly—instead of on the wings of the wind—to keep his appointment with the beautiful Mrs Curtis.

"Who is that very talkative old gentleman over there, Major Denison?" asked Phillis after Peter had gone, as they turned over some music together, and she looked at a queer gesticulating figure that was the centre of an amused throng.

"Oh, that," he replied with mock solemnity, "is a famous—I might almost say notorious—character, Major O'Shaughnessy, the well-known gentleman rider. Not a race-meeting takes place in the whole of India, I believe, at which he is not present with a string of what, in his peculiar brogue, he calls 'harrrses.'"

"Oh, he's a Major, is he? Really?"

"No, really he is a doctor—but he is called Major."

"Then how can one distinguish doctors from real . . . I mean from soldiers?"

For a minute or two Major Denison weighed the question in silence.

"Well," he said presently with great gravity, "it can frequently—I may say generally—be done by the voice,

which is almost invariably Irish and loud. I remember," he continued, "how once in Africa I had a bad go of fever, and the doctor—a first-class chap, by the way—who was attending me was suddenly transferred to another station. I didn't know of this, and when his successor—a blatant Irishman of the very worst type, whom I'd never seen before in my life—came into my tent and in stentorian tones roared, 'Put out yourrrr tongue,' I was naturally furious, and drove him out with scant courtesy. Apparently he didn't like this, and went over to our Mess, where he found the Colonel—a dear old gentleman with pince-nez perched on the tip of his nose—quietly reading the paper, and in the most unintelligible of dialects reported the matter. 'Wan of yourrrr ahfficerrrs has insulted me, sorr,' . . . &c., &c. At the conclusion of this outburst, the Colonel, who had all the time been gazing at him in blank astonishment, took off his pince-nez, and said very quietly and politely, 'Really, Captain—er—er——' looking at the card he had sent in, 'Captain Mulroney, if you have—er—as appears to be the case—any complaint to make, I must ask you to bring an interpreter, for I am quite unable to understand one word you say.'"

"Poor young man!" said Phillis laughing, "that was a little hard on him. But, joking apart, isn't it rather a confusing arrangement doctors having the same titles as officers?"

"They are officers—medical officers."

"Y-yes, but . . . why give them rank at all? Surely 'Doctor' is a title to be proud of?"

"Oh, but you see they must have army rank; they require it in their dealings with the men—the soldiers, I mean."

"Oh, the——"

"Not 'Tommies,' please, Miss Montague," he implored. "Confess it was on the tip of your tongue."

"Yes, it was," she admitted smiling, "but I won't say it if you don't like it."

"Thanks, it's a horrible word. Do just listen a moment to old O'Shaughnessy. Did you ever hear such a brogue in your life? He is telling a favourite old story of his about some boat-race he won in the dark ages."

Phillis turned to look again at the spare figure of the medical Major. He was still gesticulating violently, his lean prognathous face alight with excitement, as he shouted with an accent seldom heard except from the lips of a comic Irishman on the music hall stage—"Oi . . . oi was taken out of the boat in a dead faint, oi was. Whin oi came to, there was a crowd round me. 'Hurrah,' sez they. 'Hurrah be demmed,' sez oi. 'Just you listen to me,' oi sez; 'oi've pulled hundreds of harrrrses, oi've pulled thousands of teeth—but be jabers—oi'll never pull another boat!'" This peroration was greeted with peals of laughter.

"The old scoundrel," said Denison, *sotto voce*, "I can quite believe what he says about the 'harrrrses'!"

About a month later, Peter's supplanter, Captain Grant, late of the Jamaica Rifles, arrived at Ghazipur to join the Westshires.

He was a sleek, florid individual, blessed with a countenance which, though pink and hairless, was markedly Simian in type. He wore his hair rather long, and brushed it straight back from his narrow forehead in one continuous glossy wave right down to

the nape of his neck, which, red and thick beyond belief, was garnished with a clearly defined crease that ran, a sharp dividing line, between two rolls of wobbly fat. His smooth pink face, plump hands, and oily ways gave a general impression of flabby unwholesomeness.

Anstruther said he was just like 'one of those demmed wax figures from a barber's window, who'd been cast because he'd got too fat for the job, and begun to melt!' But then Anstruther was never very charitable in his remarks.

Notwithstanding Captain Nelson Wellington Grant's unsoldierlike appearance and his thick neck, there was about him a certain specious ape-like air of comeliness, and though almost universally abominated by men, he was, if anything, rather a success than otherwise with the fair sex.

For one thing, he was quite an authority on dress; he knew enough about it, at least, to be able to admire just those points in a woman's clothes that called for admiration, and there are very few women whose natures do not automatically respond to such discriminating appreciation—as welcome as it is unusual. Then, too, he danced well, and sang a little, and since, unlike the majority of soldier men, he did *not* play polo, or shoot, or indulge in any of the violent forms of sport or exercise common to mankind, he was always available whenever his services were required to hand tea and cake, and dance attendance, and make himself generally useful.

Peter of course hated the sight of him. Naturally, under the circumstances, he had not been prepared to welcome him with open arms. But when first he saw him actually in the flesh—sitting complacently in the

ante-room smoking a cigarette, and filling to repletion one of the dear old shabby red arm-chairs, that creaked and groaned under his weight as though resenting in its leathern heart the intrusion of an 'outsider,' he found it almost impossible to conceal the violent dislike that took possession of him.

This, then, was the sort of man who was considered fit to be brought in over his head. Pah—fat beast! Why, he looked all flabby and soft like . . . like a woman. Like some women, at least, he hastened to add, modifying the indictment as the memory of the supple strength of Phillis's slim, vigorous young frame, instinct with the glad energy of perfect health, came back to him.

What was the good of a fellow like that in the regiment, he would like to know? Did he look as if he would be a credit to them? Did he look like a leader of men?

"I suppose you're going to play polo, aren't you, Grant?" he said. "We are badly in want of a 'Back,' now that Anstruther's made up his mind to go home on leave."

"Oh, I don't care very much for riding, thanks," was the new-comer's reply; "besides," with an ingratiating smile, "I'm sure I shouldn't be nearly good enough for your team."

"Bah!" said Peter under his breath, and turned disgustedly on his heel. A few minutes later, still fuming, he burst noisily into Denison's room, shouting—

"The blighter's come!"

"Shut the door, you young devil, and moderate your transports," was all the reply he got from his skipper, who, clad in the scantiest of raiment, was busy with an

exerciser, trying to induce a little flesh and muscle to grow once more on his poor shrunken arm. "Who's come?" he inquired at length.

"Why, this . . ." stammered Peter, almost inarticulate, "this chap Grant from the West Indies—and he's even worse than you said!"

"Why, what did I say?" asked Denison, pausing for a moment in his wearisome work to look at his subaltern.

"You said he was a . . . er . . . amorous ape."

"Well, and doesn't he look like 'a . . . er . . . amorous ape'?" inquired Denison laughing. "Perhaps he's grown out of it. All the better."

"An ape! Why, an ape's a king to him. He's . . . he's a prize pig—only fatter. And pink too—just think of it. *Pink!*"

"Rubbish! I expect he's a very decent fella. You're prejudiced, of course. Why, Miss Montague was telling me only this afternoon that she had met him at Montreux last year, and rather liked him."

"Met him? Liked him?" gasped Peter. Then, in tones of the deepest disgust, "Bah! What do girls know about such things? They don't know a brute when they see one."

"Quite right too," agreed Denison. "Sensible girls should never know a brute when they see him. They should just look the other way, or else cut him dead."

"Oh, you know what I mean, Denny. I bet you'll think him awful, too. Why, you said we should all hate him, that day when we first saw his name in 'The Gazette.'"

"Nonsense! You exaggerate," said Denison. "Anyhow, now he's here, and a brother-officer and all that, we must just make the best of him. He's senior to you too,

remember, so, for goodness sake, don't go playing any of your monkey tricks on him."

On the following Saturday the long-talked-of Gymkhana took place.

There was a polo-scurry; a handicap for horses and ponies, once round the course; a jumping competition; and one event for ladies.

Peter, who had been engaged for a long time to enter for the ladies' race with Mrs Curtis, of whom he had been seeing a good deal lately, had somewhat diffidently intimated to Phillis that he would have liked awfully to ask her to be his partner, only he had been booked for ages, and couldn't very well get out of it.

"Oh, I've got a partner, thanks," had been her sedate reply.

She had been rather stiff with him lately—distant even.

Once or twice he had not been able to do things with her because he'd been going to the Curtis'—and she didn't like it.

She thought Mollie was sweet, and admired her enormously, but she couldn't understand in the least how any 'nice' married woman could possibly want a train of admirers always following her about. And when there seemed to be every prospect of Peter's becoming permanently one of the train, she simply couldn't bear it.

That he should be mixed up in a flirtation, however harmless, with a married woman seemed to her to be so . . . so unworthy of him; to be such a—to quote one of his own expressions—such a rotten thing for him to do.

For his part, Peter was beginning to feel that his growing intimacy with Mollie Curtis, though very charming and delightful, of course, had undoubtedly one serious drawback. The more he saw of her, the less he saw of Phil. And although the glamour—especially just at first—of being the favoured slave of the one was great, it was as nothing compared with the happiness—the real pleasure—of being the chosen ‘pal’ of the other.

In fact, in his heart of hearts he was not altogether sorry to learn that the judge was shortly going on tour, and that his fascinating wife, who never deserted her ‘Billy,’ was going with him. Perhaps *then* he would get an opportunity of seeing more of his old playmate—of wooing back the sweet smile of friendship to her lips—of coaxing the glad light of welcome once again to her eyes. And when at the Gymkhana he discovered to his disgust that the partner she had spoken of was none other than the objectionable Grant, he felt that it was indeed high time he came forward to protect her from such eminently undesirable acquaintances.

The Ladies’ Event took the form of a sufficiently inane competition, in which the men had to gallop a few hundred yards to a spot where the ladies were awaiting them. There, having dismounted, each of them handed to his partner a paper containing some half-a-dozen ‘General Knowledge’ questions. These the ladies had to answer unassisted, and then, refolding the papers, hand them back to their respective cavaliers, who mounted and galloped off to the winning-post—the first past the post with correct answers to win.

But the race is not always to the swift.

Peter, most skilful and dashing of horsemen, was first past the post by a very long way; but for all that he was not the winner . . . nor second . . . nor even third! It was his partner who was to blame for this.

Mollie Curtis's ideas on the subject of General Knowledge were of the sketchiest description, and the answers she hastily scrawled on the paper were, to say the least of it, rather wide of the mark. She knew neither the name of the Prime Minister nor of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and thought that Velasquez was a famous violinist. She had no doubt whatever that 'Eleven thousand eleven hundred and eleven' was written in figures 11111; and to the simple question, 'What is The Pentateuch?' she was inspired to write the amazing reply, 'A part of a bicycle.'

Nor was she at all disconcerted when Peter, vicariously ashamed, shyly explained to her the reason why the prize should not be theirs. She only laughed and said, shrugging her pretty shoulders—

"Silly old questions, of course I couldn't answer them right," and vanished into the tea tent, followed by a train of 'danglers.'

So utilitarian an accomplishment as that of answering General Knowledge questions correctly savoured far too much of the board school to suit her taste—was indeed, as she would herself have described it, not in the very least in her line.

As for poor Phillis who, as the latest from school, might perhaps have shone, she never had a chance from the first, as her partner fell off. And the prize was eventually adjudged to Platt and the formidable

Mrs Kelly. Slow old Platitude had not come in among the first half dozen, but 'P.K.,' veteran victor in many a similar contest, had got the answers to every single question right, and consequently she and her partner had won 'hands down.'

The moment the racing was over and Peter found himself free, he made his way straight to Phillis, who, with Grant—looking rather the worse for wear after his fall—still in close attendance, was strolling about the smooth, well-kept grass listening to the band.

Getting rid of the Amorous Ape by the simple expedient of telling him that the mud on his face was not becoming, he asked Phillis if she wouldn't like an ice.

"Yes, I think I would, please," she said a little stiffly, and together they made their way to the West-shires' big marquee, where roses and ferns, damask and glass, together with some of the famous plate of which the regiment was so justly proud, made a brave show.

"I say," began Peter rather hesitatingly, not feeling very sure how his remarks would be received, "what on earth did you want to go and enter with that chap Grant for?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked in innocent inquiry, turning upon him the tranquil regard of her blue eyes, clear and untroubled as a child's. "I thought it very kind of him to ask me."

"Oh, because he's . . . because I don't think he's a very nice friend for you, you know."

"Nonsense, Peter, you old grandmother. I knew him in Switzerland; that's why he asked me. I'm very glad he did, too, otherwise I shouldn't have had a partner."

"Well, I hope you won't get too thick with him, that's all."

Phillis's eyes flashed.

"I am not in the least likely ever to get a quarter as thick with him as you are with Mrs Curtis," she retorted.

This outrageous remark he wisely passed over in silence.

"Phil," he said presently, and now there was a note of pleading in his voice, "couldn't you . . . couldn't I . . . couldn't we . . . see a little more of one another in future somehow?"

"Oh, you're always engaged," she replied petulantly, "driving about in motor-cars."

"I would ever so much rather be driving about with you," he said. "Seriously, Phil, do let's be friends again. You can't think how I hate it when you're snubby and cross to me. We've scarcely had any rides together yet to speak of either, but perhaps," searching her face anxiously, "perhaps you wouldn't care about it now?"

"Oh, but I would," she protested eagerly, softened a little by his evident sincerity.

"Then let's," he said fervently, albeit a little obscurely.

"I don't know quite how much to believe from such an accomplished squire of dames as you've become lately, Peter," she said satirically. "Still, if you really mean it, and if you're sorry for being so horrid, deserting me all alone in a strange land, possibly in time, if you are very good, you may . . . I can't say for certain . . . but you *may* be pardoned;" and she smiled at him adorably, her resentment at his supposed defection already more than half appeased.

"Please I'm sorry," pleaded Peter penitently.

And before they said good-bye that evening she had forgiven him; had promised to be his partner in the next Gymkhana; had arranged to ride with him in the mornings; to play to him; had, in fact, reinstated him in his old place in her affections from which he had never in reality—and only for a short time in imagination—been deposed.

CHAPTER VI.

“Are we not formed as notes of music are
For one another, though dissimilar?”

DURING the fleeting weeks that followed, as often as Peter was not required for parades or other duties, he went for long, glorious, never-to-be-forgotten rides with Phillis.

In the delicious cool of the early morning, over the dew-spangled grass, they sped together; each happy in the companionship of the other; both young, both more than commonly blessed with the good gifts of nature—good looks, good spirits, healthy bodies, happy minds.

Enjoying to the full the perfectly unconstrained friendship and affection of the sweet maid, Peter felt rich indeed. How he rejoiced in the sight of her slim and graceful beauty, as now she swayed to the rhythm of the canter, or again, leant idly back in the saddle, one hand resting on her pony's quarters, whilst, in the deep shadow of some ancient grove, they drew rein for a moment, the heaving flanks of their glossy Arabs bearing witness to the speed at which they had flown.

But soon he came to know only too well—indeed he must have known from the beginning, had he but given the matter a thought—whither such dalliance on primrose-strewn paths must inevitably lead.

All day long he thought of her. All night the haunting memory of her blue eyes, tranquil, untroubled, perilously sweet, disturbed his slumbers.

He loved her.

At first he put the thought from him—laughed at it indeed. Phillis and he had always looked upon love, and 'all that sort of thing,' as nonsense; and he felt quite sure that she would not hesitate to stigmatise his feelings now, were she ever to come to know of them, as 'silly.' He certainly could never stand that.

Besides, what right had he—a pauper now that old Sir Peter had played him such a trick—to think of falling in love? Single blessedness must be his fate.

Then he oughtn't to see so much of her, he supposed. Perhaps. . . . Bah! conceited ass that he was. As if any girl would be the least likely to care for him in that way—what an idea!

He had always felt the profoundest contempt for the 'silly ass' type of man who thought that every woman was in love with him.

He hoped that some day Phyllis would make a jolly good match—of course he did—dear little girl. Some fellow with 'pots' of money like . . . like . . . oh, not like that infernal chap Stubbs—any one but Stubbs!

Yet, after all, why not? He would probably be awfully good to her, and give her everything she wanted. Of course he was a bit of a bounder, but nowadays that didn't seem to matter. Wasn't he in a very gorgeous cavalry regiment, and didn't that cover a multitude of sins? True, most of his brother officers belonged to much the same class as himself, and were closely connected with trade—so much so, indeed, that the title of 'The Trades Union' had been bestowed on

the corps—but nobody seemed to mind how awful they were as long as they had lots of money to spend.

Poisonous gang!

To be sure, as they grew up they seemed to become rather less offensive; some of the senior officers, indeed, were quite decent fellows.

But the newly joined!—they were the ‘Boys’—smelling of the recently acquired wealth of their plebeian parents—as often as not of Jewish extraction, too—their little, low minds filled full, to the exclusion of everything else, of the doings of ballet-girls and race-horses—their little, mean souls filled with the desire, not to bear worthily that grand old title, to which by birth they had no remotest claim, of officer and gentleman, but rather to get ‘in’ with smart people—to make use of all the money their far too lavish parents gave them, to push themselves into the society of those who—but for the fact that they were officers of the army—would never for one instant have dreamed of tolerating them.

Peter laughed as he remembered how Major Anstruther, who had been ‘auctioneer’ at the last race lotteries, had neatly ‘touched off,’ with a happy phrase, an appalling little Jew-boy, the ‘Trades’ Union’s’ last-joined.

“Going . . . going . . .” he had cried, lifting his auctioneer’s hammer. “This horse’s chance is going ridiculously cheap, gentlemen.” Then, looking down the table to where the Jew-boy’s bean-shaped nose glistened greedily, he had said, “Surely *you* are going to make a bid, sir—you with the rich face!”

Prejudice, of course, all prejudice. He himself was prejudiced, he supposed, and narrow—too narrow perhaps.

In the abstract, the Jews were a magnificent, a

splendid old race; but close at hand, in the flesh—in the objectionable persons of these heavily-gilded youths, for instance—he simply couldn't stand them. What an extraordinary amount of feeling there always was, to be sure, in all ranks of society, against the Chosen People, rich or poor.

There was a Jew private, long ago, in the Westshires—so the story went—who used always to be compelled to fall in on Sundays with the rest of the regiment for church parade.

The sergeant-major, an ardent Protestant, would then give the words of command: 'Battalion, 'tshun! Fall out the Jew!' And out of the ranks would step the poor Hebrew outcast, and creep back alone to barracks.

All this, of course, was done before the officers came on to parade, and directly the persecution was discovered, it was put a stop to.

Certainly 'oppression' was a fitting badge for all their tribe, since, when not oppressed, they forthwith became oppressors.

For himself, well, he frankly hated them.

Was it envy of their wealth that made him so bitter against them? Perhaps that had a good deal to do with it. It always had been, throughout the ages, at the root of the whole world's antipathy to Jews. Envious of them, in a way, he was, without a doubt: there was such a deuce of a lot of things they could do with their money. What polo ponies they could buy; what motors; and—and of course they could always afford to marry whenever they liked.

Well, he couldn't, then, and that was all about it.

Marriage, indeed! Why, he could scarcely keep his head above water as it was.

If it were not for the hope that Stella—who was coming on splendidly, and whose temper, his chief anxiety, had lately been that of a lamb—would, by winning the big race, keep him afloat, and give him a chance of getting rid of his host of creditors, he saw every prospect of going under altogether.

Gloomy forebodings.

And did he wish to involve her—his beautiful, his golden Phillis—in his misfortunes; to drag her down with him in his ruin. God forbid! Then these constant thoughts of her must cease.

He had lately got into a bad habit, which was fast growing upon him, of going over and over in his mind her words—her dear words: of hearing again, in imagination, her sweet voice: of conjuring up, in his mind, the scenes they had taken part in together: of recalling how she had looked when she had said this or that: how dark and deep and dreamy—sombre almost—had seemed her blue eyes in the wood: how a strand of her bright hair, that had blown loose in her gallop, had touched his cheek. . . .

All such dreams must be dreamt no more . . . never more.

But whilst Peter's feelings towards his old play-mate had undergone so great a change, Phillis's towards him had altered not at all. She thought he was a dear boy, of course, but she was by no means in love with him. Such an idea, indeed, had never once entered her pretty head. At that period of her life she was far more occupied in having a 'good time' and enjoying herself than in falling in love.

As for marriage, whenever she thought of it, which

was rarely, it was always as a dim prospect in the remote future, vaguely connected in her mind, somehow, with a certain wealthy young officer of Dragoons—a boisterous but kindly soul who, according to her parents, 'would be sure to make any girl a good husband!'

Peter was to her just the old Peter of her childhood; nothing more. Quite as a matter of course, she looked upon him as her natural protector, and teased him, confided in him, laughed at and scolded him, in exactly the same way as she had done in the old schoolroom days. Poor boy, her treatment of him made things rather difficult sometimes. He loved her to distraction, to destitution rather! he told himself with a wry face, over and over again, so as to fix the fact firmly in his mind. And he must never let her know it—never plead his cause with her. He was a pauper. It would not be 'playing the game.'

Just about this time, quite by chance, she made the discovery that he could sing.

He never used to sing long ago, she was quite certain of that. And now he made the barefaced confession that he had always taken jolly good care to hide this accomplishment of his from her when she was a rude little girl, for fear that she would jeer at him.

He was still very shy about it, he said, and never could bear the idea of standing up and making a fool of himself before a lot of unappreciative idiots, who didn't care a rap about music, or know one note from another.

"Well, you will often have to sing to me, Peter, now that I've found you out," decreed She-who-must-be-obeyed.

"There's nothing I should like better," he said. "I've

got a whole heap of songs over in my house. But I'll only sing to you when you are by yourself, mind, Phil—never when there are people about.”

“What, not even to Mollie Curtis, if she were to come back from the Jungle to listen to you?”

She could laugh now about what she called his ‘infatuation’ for the beautiful Mrs Curtis, feeling quite sure that such foolishness, if it had ever really existed, was definitely at an end.

His voice was a revelation to her, so pure in quality it was, so true, so sensitively sweet. It fascinated her, affecting her subtly in a way she did not understand. Whilst as for dear old Mrs Cumberledge—who was sometimes allowed into her own drawing-room as a great favour, to listen—she used frankly, and without any attempt whatever at concealment, to shed sentimental tears of mingled sorrow and enjoyment.

“Do just sing ‘Auld Robin Gray’ before you go,” she would almost invariably ask, when it was time for him to say good-bye. And then she would sit listening, in an ecstasy of grief and rapture, as his fresh young voice took up the piteous tale in such melodious, tender strains that it became positively heart-rending.

Peter could not help noticing that Phillis generally selected the most passionate of love songs for him to sing to her. And just as he was beginning to play with the alluring thought—the forbidden idea—that perhaps, after all, she might some day outgrow her sisterly regard for him, and come to look upon him—when he was better off, of course—as possibly . . . possibly something dearer . . . he was abruptly brought

to his senses by her telling him, her sweet eyes alight with what he had flattered himself was emotion, that she thought his voice sounded so jolly in that sort of sentimental nonsense; *that* was why she always chose it.

“Laugh not, nor weep, but let thine eyes
Grow soft and dim, so love should be,”

he sang, in a voice that would have melted a heart of stone, but which failed entirely to cause Miss Phillis the slightest tremor.

“And be thy breathing tender, quick,
And tremulous, whilst I gaze on thee.
And let thy words be few or none ;
But murmurs, such as soothe the air
In summer, when the day is done,
Be heard, sweetheart. . . .”

“Wait a moment—I don’t think you hang on quite long enough to that note, Peter. Now, again.”

The heartless little monster; the inexorable little tyrant . . . how could he help loving her!

He began to realise, though, that this sweet intimacy of theirs could not possibly continue on its present footing; flesh and blood could not stand it. But then again, what was the alternative? Never to see her at all—why, this very thought was intolerable.

One day they came across a song which described their relative positions towards one another with what he felt was painful accuracy. A dear little song it was, about—as is not unusual in songs—a lover and his lass. The lady, it appeared, had for a while deserted her swain, whose lament, which formed the

refrain of the song, was, as even Phillis of the cold heart was forced to admit, pathetic to a degree.

“And what *she* calls a week,
Is for ever and a day.”

“Exactly how Phil and I would feel about it,” thought Peter miserably, as he sang the plaintive words over and over again to her heartless, though artistic, accompaniment.

One morning he took her down to the racecourse to see his beautiful, his ‘priceless’ mare Stella do a gallop; and on the way home he explained to her a little more fully than he had hitherto done of what vital importance the winning of the coming race was to him—how some of his creditors were already pressing for their money—and how increasingly difficult he found it to stave them off with fair words alone.

Until this moment she had never quite realised how desperate the situation was.

Peter seemed always to have everything he wanted, and poverty, she knew, meant having to do without. Poor boy! his face looked quite drawn and haggard as he told her of his difficulties—they were evidently very real and threatening then,—and her heart went out to him in ready sympathy.

“Oh, Peterkin,” she cried, “why were you so reckless? What is there I can do to help?”

“Nothing—nothing, thanks, Phil. It’ll be all right,” he replied, shaking off his despondency at her words. “Thanks awfully all the same, dear. I’ve been rather a ‘Juggins,’ of course; but it was my old uncle’s marriage that really put me ‘in the cart.’ Fancy an old

man like that wanting to marry. How could I possibly have foretold such a thing? It only remains now for a son and heir to be born to him to put what we so elegantly call the 'tin hat' on all my chances."

"Oh, Peter, I'm so sorry. Do you owe much?"

"Yes, an awful lot. But I'm not going to bother you about such things any more. Come, let's gallop."

"I've got an idea, Peter," she said a few minutes later as they reached the edge of the grass and pulled up into a walk. "You'll have to marry money."

"Oh, I shall never marry," he replied hastily, flinching a little.

"Why not? A nice girl, of course."

"Who would have me, I should like to know. Besides, there's not only the girl to think of; there would be her people too. I should be sure to hate them like blazes; and they would look upon me as a spendthrift and a fortune-hunter."

"Then you must marry an orphan."

"She would have to be a 'well-off-un' to do me any good," he said with a laugh.

"You wretched boy, when *will* you be serious? All the same, it's quite a good idea—what you would call 'sound.' *I've* got to do it, you know."

"Do what, Phil?"

"Why, marry money."

"You don't mean to say you're engaged."

"No, no," said Phillis, getting scarlet. "I mean I shall have to some day."

"I say, Phil . . ."

"Yes?"

"I say . . ."

"Yes?" encouragingly.

"Is that fella Stubbs coming here for the race-week?"

"N-no, he can't come after all," she replied, busying herself with one of her gloves. "He'll be on manœuvres or something."

"Hurrah!" cried Peter.

"I'm sorry," she went on defiantly, turning upon him her straight, direct, boy's look. "I know you don't like him, so you needn't pretend; but he's very nice all the same . . . and kind . . . and . . ."

"Hurrah!" cried Peter again.

"You're an old stupid," said Phillis, laughing; then maliciously, "We shall see him at the elephant hunt, though."

"What elephant hunt?"

"Oh, didn't Mrs Cumberledge tell you? We are to go and stay with a Rajah for a week and catch elephants; won't it be fun?"

"Nonsense, Phil. Catch elephants! How are you going to catch them?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but we're going to."

"You'll be here for the race-week, surely, won't you?" he asked, agitated at the thought of her leaving Ghazipur. "We're going to give a ball, and . . . and there'll be no end of gaiety."

"Of course, we shouldn't think of missing the Week, you silly boy, and all the dances, and the races, and the polo—rather not. But directly it is over we go off to the jungle. The Commissioner—he's such an old dear, Peter, and I'm to call him Uncle Jimmy for the future, only I know I shall never remember to—has to tour about his district or something for a bit, and then we go off down south—to Hardwar, I think it is—to catch elephants."

"You'll be away for ages and ages, I suppose; and what am I to do?" he inquired dismally.

"Nonsense, Peter. Only a few weeks."

"Only a few weeks, she says." Then mournfully he quoted the pathetic little refrain—

"And what *she* calls a week,
Is for ever and a day!"

CHAPTER VII.

"A little sorrow, a little pleasure
Fate metes us from the dusty measure
That holds the date of all of us."

AT length, with Christmas over, came the Race-Week.

For some time past the small frontier station of Ghazipur had talked of little else. All the gaiety that, judiciously distributed, might have lasted the whole winter was to be crowded into a bare six days—races, polo, dances, dinners, at homes, all following one on top of the other with kaleidoscope rapidity. The club was crowded, the Messes filled to overflowing, and tents by the score sprang up in all directions.

On the first morning of this eventful 'Week,' Peter, noticing that Denison did not put in an appearance at breakfast, went round to his rooms to see what had become of him.

He found him sitting hunched up over a fire, looking very cross and very miserable, and very sorry for himself indeed.

"*Hullo*, old chap!" he said solicitously.

"G . . . rr . . . rr. G'way, can't you," was all the welcome he got.

"What's up, old man?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing; only I'm sick of it all . . . sick of it . . . sick of it."

Peter looked rather concerned. He knew these fits of depression to which Denison was subject; for a time he would be bitter and vindictive and misanthropic and discontented—in short, quite impossible—then suddenly he would get all right again.

"I thought you were dining out, Denny, when you didn't turn up at Mess last night," he said, "instead of which you were glooming here, I suppose. Why didn't you go over to dinner, or give me a shout, or something?"

"Because I hate dinner—I loathe, detest, and utterly abhor dinner—and all meals—and all companionship,—and only want to be let alone," was the encouraging reply.

Poor old Denny, thought Peter, these black fits are the very devil.

"What's the trouble, old man? Anything in particular?" he asked.

"I'm useless—a derelict—that's what's the trouble. Look at this hand of mine," and he held it up and eyed it contemptuously, "crippled and maimed so that I can't even write with it, much less play polo or do any of the things I used to . . . to care about."

"It is bad luck, old chap," said Peter sympathetically.

"Unfitted for my profession too," went on Denison, expatiating on his woes, "a profession which at the least demands *sound* bodies and limbs . . ."

Here Peter interrupted him.

"Rats," he said. "You're worth more as a soldier than all the rest of us put together."

"Bah! . . . For a miserable pittance I have sold my

body to be a target for my country's foes, a sordid bargain at best! I wish the beastly bullet that wounded me had put an end to me altogether."

"Your liver's all wrong," said Peter, "that's what's the matter with you, old man. Surely it must be some satisfaction to feel that all that time in Africa wasn't . . . wasn't quite wasted. Is it nothing to have been mentioned in despatches three times—or was it four? And to have got a Brevet? To say nothing of being recommended for the V.C.? I know most men would be jolly proud of such a record."

"Bah! . . . What's the good of it now that this infernal hand of mine—my right hand—my sword hand—is useless?"

"Well, doesn't it help a bit to remember *how* you got it wounded? Young Forbes wouldn't be alive and kicking to-day but for you."

"Bah! . . . I would give a hundred young Forbeses for a sound hand."

Peter laughed.

"You didn't think so at the time," he said, "which was perhaps just as well for young Forbes."

"Don't talk rot, Dare. . . . Besides, every one was mentioned in despatches—and as for a Brevet, what's the use of it, I should like to know? It doesn't do one the slightest good—and only causes a lot of jealousy. Mine cost me quite half my friends, I can tell you—and the other half would have gone too if that rubbish about a V.C. had ever come to anything. Why on earth any one should be jealous of a Brevet," he continued fretfully, "beats me. It's the rottenest sort of reward going—doesn't even, in India at least, carry any pay with it—or count as real rank at all, as far as I can see. In fact,

the only difference it has ever made to me has been to let me in for a lot of beastly Courts Martial, on which I've had to sit as President, and which otherwise I should have escaped altogether. Oh, but I'm forgetting," he added satirically with a bitter laugh, "there's one other very important difference. At dinner-parties and other social functions, particularly in India, where your under-bred, second-rate Englishman is in his glory, and holds all sorts of exalted civil appointments—where the Laws of Precedence are of far more importance than the Decalogue—where the women, saturated with alcohol and tobacco . . ."

"Steady on, old man."

" . . . there, I say, my Brevet rank as a Field Officer of some seven years' standing ensures my taking in some comparatively 'senior' lady—to borrow a term from their revolting jargon—who generally turns out to be an old frump, instead of . . ."

"My dear old chap, has the doctor been yet?" broke in Peter anxiously, not knowing quite what to make of this tirade.

"Yes, he has; and he's given me some awful poison to take, too—not that it'll do me the slightest good. What I want is a change. I'm going to put in for three months' leave to Japan; that'll be more likely to put me right than any amount of filthy medicine. A chill on the liver is what I am supposed to have got."

"A chill on the liver; that's it, of course," said Peter, relieved; "had it myself once, so I know exactly how you feel. I as near as possible committed suicide. Let's see . . ." he went on, prowling round the room, "safety razor . . . can't do yourself much harm with that. Guns, revolver, and cartridges all locked away

in there, are they? Well . . . I'll just put the key in my pocket, if you don't mind."

"You young ass. You don't really think I should do a rotten thing like that, do you?"

"Well, you won't get a chance just now, anyway," replied Peter laughing; "but don't be so down in the mouth, old man. You'll soon be all right again. Who's looking after you?"

"Thank Heaven, our own man's away, and I've got a rather knowledgeable sort of chap called Graham."

"Oh, that must be the fella who was dining in Mess last night," said Peter, subsiding into a chair. "Talkative sort of bloke—seems to know a lot about natives too; he was telling us no end of queer stories about 'em—the extraordinary things they'll do to revenge themselves on their enemies. Years ago, he said, when he first came out to India, he was several times called in to attend natives who were . . . in . . . what do you call it? . . . in extremis; and afterwards to certify as to the cause of their deaths. On every blooming occasion the sick man made a solemn declaration that he was dying from the effects of a beating received from some enemy whose name and address he was careful to give. For the first few times the doctor fella . . . what's his name? . . . Graham, isn't it? . . . said he didn't bother his head about it very much, one way or the other, but just took the man's word and gave the required certificate that death was due to violence. At the same time he couldn't help thinking that the natives of India must have pretty rotten physique, as the bruises and wounds he had to examine were never anything like bad enough to cause the death of a European. So at last one day, when he was called

in to attend an aged Hindu who was dying, and who—although there were no marks whatever of violence on him—told him the same old yarn about having been beaten by his enemy, so-and-so, he smelt a rat, and when the old boy ‘popped off,’ just jolly well held a post-mortem. To his surprise he discovered that the singular old party had swallowed enough poison to kill half-a-dozen men.”

“They’re a rum lot,” growled Denison, “I’ve heard something of the sort before. It’s quite beyond us, isn’t it, that any one should be such an ass as to kill himself in order to get some one else hanged? Why, the silly blighter wouldn’t even be there to see his enemy go to the gallows. What possible satisfaction can there be in that, I should like to know? A rum lot they are—a devilish rum lot.”

“Cruel brutes too,” went on Peter, bent on distracting Denison’s thoughts from his ailments and misfortunes. “Graham told me a story about one of them who, because he had a ‘down’ on another, murdered his own mother—a poor old cripple—and deposited her body in his enemy’s garden, thinking—as he ingenuously confessed when the crime was brought home to him—that no one would ever imagine he could possibly have killed his own mother, and that consequently his enemy would be bound to get strung up for the murder!”

“Yes, they’re cruel, cold-blooded sort of devils, some of them,” said Denison. “But lots of natives are real good sorts—first-rate servants, too. Look at your old man David; why, he’s worth his weight in gold. My chap’s a decent enough fella too; he’s a Pathan though, and you never can quite tell what a Pathan will

be up to. *They* are cruel if you like ; and the Afghans, their next-door neighbours, are of course frightful savages. I remember a horrible tale about two men and a woman who were mixed up in some crime or another—robbery I think it was—and who bolted from Kabul. They were caught after a bit, and taken before the old Amir for judgment. After listening to the case the Amir said, 'Make soup of this woman.' So she was led out and popped into the cauldron, and that was the end of her. Then the two men were told that they could have the soup if they liked ; and they were advised to make it last as long as possible, as it was all they were to get this side the grave—their sentence being 'Death by Starvation.' What do you think of that as an instance of making 'the punishment fit the crime' ? ”

“Abominable,” said Peter indignantly. “Such things oughtn't to be allowed.”

“Unfortunately there's nothing to prevent an absolute monarch from doing just exactly what he pleases. All he has to do is to say, 'Off with his head,' like the Queen in 'Alice in Wonderland,' and off it comes.” Peter laughed ; Denny seemed to be a little better now, he told himself.

“They're playing the first round of the polo tournament this afternoon. We've drawn a 'Bye,' you know,” he said, anxious to keep the invalid's thoughts from wandering gloomwards again.

“Yes,” replied Denison, “we're in luck. It's a thousand pities you can't find a better 'One' than old Platt, and that the team is so badly off for ponies. All the same, I'm sure you'll do well. 'A' is always at his best in a tournament.”

"Yes; he's simply splendid," said Peter, "and he's so jolly well mounted too. Old Apollyon, of course, is a famous pony—best Arab in India in his time, they all say, and I suppose his time's not so very long past, is it?"

"No. Two years ago he was far and away the best pony the 2nd Hussars had, and they won the Inter-Regimental."

Peter glowed reverentially at such transcendent fame.

"He is up to such a lot of weight, too," went on Denison, "and handy as a cat. 'A' calls him old Polly, and laughs at him for a broken-down screw because of that small spavin of his, but all the same he thinks no end of him, and has never regretted the enormous price he had to pay for him. Last year the 'Trades' Union' badly wanted to buy him, and offered all sorts of fabulous sums, I believe, but 'A' wouldn't hear of it. They've got some beautiful ponies in that regiment."

"Yes. . . . Of course they'll win here easily," said Peter, ruefully; "what chance have we against such overwhelming wealth?"

"It is annoying, I know," said Denison. "All the same, it's not *only* wealth that makes them such a good team. They're a sporting lot; ride hard, and all that, and play a jolly good game."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Peter a little grudgingly, finding it hard to treat the matter quite so philosophically. "Some of them are over in the Mess now; queer-looking coves, with very long coats and very gay socks and ties; smelling to Heaven of scent, too! We've made them 'honorary members,' of course, during their stay here. Some of their acceptances of the

'honor' are stuck up on the notice-board in the ante-room. They're in the stereotyped form all right, saying it's a privilege of which they will gladly avail themselves; but in each case the word privilege is spelt p-r-i-v-i-l-e-d-g-e!"

Denison laughed.

"Take care you don't notice too much, young man. As long as they're staying with us such critical observation almost amounts to a breach of the sacred laws of hospitality. Besides, all polo teams spell privilege with a 'd'; I've often noticed it. You might as well expect them to spell bachelor without a 't,' or 'all right' with two ll's."

Just then there came a knock at the door which opening disclosed the honest face and sturdy figure of Platt, come to inquire after the invalid.

"He wants cheering up," said Peter, "and you're just the man to do it, Platitude. You've got to keep him in a roar of laughter all the time, mind. Your conversation must scintillate with wit—must fairly coruscate with brilliancy. Go on now, begin sparkling."

"Haw, haw," grunted Platt with a deprecating smile, "'fraid that's not much in my line. I say, Dare, seriously," he went on in his slow way, "joking apart, you know, what do you think of Stella's chances on Friday? Think she'll win?"

"Bound to," said Peter, placidly.

"Seems pretty rampageous, don't she? Jolly nearly got rid of her 'boy' on the racecourse this morning after you had gone. And as I came by her stable just now it sounded to me very much . . ." he paused, and then went on with exasperating deliberation, "very much as if she was trying to kick it to pieces."

"You old fool," cried Peter, rushing to the door and dashing it open. "Why the devil didn't you say so at once . . ." and he flung out of the room.

"Mind, I don't want to throw cold blankets on your hopes of winning," went on this Job's comforter; but Peter was gone.

"Excitable chap Dare," soliloquised Platt, shaking his head. Then to Denison, "Sorry to hear you're seedy, Major—you'll miss the Week."

"Oh, no, I shall be all right in a day or two, thanks."

"You must be well by the night of the ball, anyway."

"What ball?"

"Why, *our* ball. The fancy dress ball."

"Oh, of course, of course—I had forgotten for the moment."

"We *are* in for a gay time of it, Major," pounded on Platt complacently, "I've just had another dinner invitation—that makes six."

"What a social success you are, to be sure!"

"I refused it," said Platt, upon whom satire was lost. "It was from Mrs Kelly. Have you ever noticed how she signs herself?"

"N-no . . ." growled Denison. "Oh yes, I have, though—Bar Kelly, isn't it? Very suitable, too, as every one seems to bar P. K."

"Haw," grunted Platt; that was his way of laughing. "Bar Kelly—very suitable, too—haw." Then, after a pause for reflection, "But what does it mean . . . Bar?"

"Oh, I suppose it's one of those pernicious abbreviations that women are so fond of. Probably her name is Barbara."

"Oh, Bar, short for Barbara," cried Platt, delighted at the solution of the mystery.

"Yes, that must be it. Reminds me of those kiddies of my sister's," said Denison, laughing at the recollection, and pointing to a photograph of two saintly looking children. "They tried this shortening dodge upon one another with disastrous results. Helen and Godfrey are their names, you know—harmless names enough, but pretty startling when abbreviated into . . . well, the place of torment and the Supreme Being!"

Platt, when after a moment or two he saw the point, was fairly convulsed, and Denison, cheered a little by his appreciative mirth, went on—

"Rum little beggars they are, to be sure. The elder one, Helen, said to me one day, 'Uncle Fitz—my Christian name's Fitzroy, you know—' Uncle Fitz, is Fitz your *real* name, or do you have them?' What do you think of that? Suspected me of epilepsy, I suppose."

This was the sort of humour that directly appealed to his hearer, and when Peter came back after pacifying the mare, he found the patient considerably less misanthropic, and Platt still gurgling delightedly over the last story.

CHAPTER VIII.

“To chase the glowing hours with flying feet!”

ALTHOUGH gay, pleasure-loving little Mollie Curtis had, in obedience to the dictates of conscience, dutifully accompanied her husband into the Wilds, it was hardly to be expected that she would deny herself the delirious delights of the race-week.

Indeed, her ‘dear old Billy’ never for one moment contemplated the possibility of her sacrificing herself to such an extent, and consequently took care so to arrange his tour that he might be within a day’s march of Ghazipur when the festivities began.

So it came about that Mollie, freed for seven rapturous days from the monotony of camp life, once more sweetened with her gracious presence the little frontier station of which she was the queen.

It would, Anstruther told her, have been a gloomy Week for him if she hadn’t come.

And as he was just on the point of sailing for England, and as she wouldn’t see him again for ever so long, and as, after all, he was rather a ‘dear,’ she didn’t see why she shouldn’t ‘let herself go’ a little—why she shouldn’t enjoy herself and have a good time like other people. She wasn’t afraid of old ‘A’ . . . besides ‘Billy didn’t

mind.' Her sudden desire to be 'friends' with Peter seemed to have died a natural death. There were so many aspirants, each vying with the other, for the prize of her friendship, for the favour of her smiles, that she had scarcely time to notice even that he had dropped out of the race; that he was no longer at her beck and call.

One of the chief events of the Week was the West-shires' fancy dress ball.

No pains had been spared to ensure its success, and all the arrangements were quite perfect.

The fancy dress in which most of the officers appeared was a very good one, as picturesque and becoming as it was appropriate, being an exact copy of the uniform worn by the regiment two hundred years before—full-skirted crimson coat reaching nearly to the knees, slashed with blue, and embroidered with broad bands of gold; knee-breeches, white silk stockings and buckled shoes, wig, delicate lace ruffles at throat and wrist, and hanging on the breast, suspended from a broad blue ribbon round the neck, a minute gorget of silver beautifully chased,—a quaint relic of times still more remote when the breastplate, not shrunk to Liliputian size like this, but large and serviceable, still lingered in the army, last remnant of the heavy armour worn by medieval knights.

The Colonel, for reasons best known to himself, had not seen fit to obtain one of these costumes; but instead, elected, with his unerring instinct for doing the most unsuitable thing under all circumstances, to attend the ball—a ball given by his own regiment, and at which he, of course, was the chief host—dressed as a clown.

Between the colonel of a regiment and the rest of

the officers there is, as all the world knows, a great gulf fixed. There is not one of them, not even the Second-in-Command, who can say to him, "For the love of Heaven, don't make such an ass of yourself!"—more's the pity.

On this particular occasion, although all the officers of his regiment were thoroughly ashamed of him, and would have given worlds to be able to disown him altogether, still, so strong are the bonds of discipline that they were quite powerless even to protest against his buffoonery, and just had to suffer in silence.

Peter met Phillis and Mrs Cumberledge at the main entrance when they drove up, and as he piloted them through the gaily-dressed crowd to the ballroom, he told them indignantly of the nefarious behaviour of the Colonel who, he declared, was doing his best to make the regiment 'a laughing-stock' throughout the Service.

They were just in time to see the redoubtable Punch make his grand entry; and Peter—who was still only a boy, and intensely susceptible to ridicule—found the sight humiliating to the last degree.

"Look, Phil, look! Oh, I say, hang it all!" he exclaimed, as with—it must be acknowledged—considerable skill, Colonel Weir, acting the part of clown to perfection, took a short run, and, with a loud crow of triumph, squatted down on his heels and slid, in a sitting posture, right across the ballroom from one side to the other.

The officers of the Westshires, when they saw their Colonel thus playing the mountebank before several hundred people, were, as may well be imagined, filled with indignation; and one and all, at some time or another during that eventful evening, committed the very serious offence of 'Conspiring to resist Authority'

—were, in fact, guilty of what, as Denison had so carefully explained to Peter, was nothing short of mutiny. But for all their rage they were quite helpless. There seemed to be literally no way in which they could punish the offender, and avenge the slight he had put upon their regiment. They were in despair.

Later in the evening, the arrival of Major Anstruther, who, as field officer of the week, had been detained by some garrison duties and had come on to the ball in ordinary mess dress, raised their hopes a little.

His antipathy to C.Os. 'as a race,' as he called them in his lordly insubordinate manner, was well known, and never surely had there been in the whole history of the regiment a commanding officer who so richly deserved his dislike.

Perhaps his fertile, lawless brain would find a way; and as the event proved, they were not doomed to disappointment.

Meanwhile Phillis, dressed as 'Winter,' and looking perfectly adorable in a frock all swansdown and snow-flakes, with icicles glittering in her bright hair, which fell a shining radiant mist to her waist, was having a lovely time.

She had plenty of partners, the floor was perfect, and the ballroom and the band just exquisite. What more could heart of mortal maid desire! She and Peter danced together, and sat out together, and quarrelled and made it up again, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves like happy children.

There was no one in the world, she thought, who could dance like Peter, so smoothly and easily and comfortably; who could steer so well, and look so nice. Dear old Peterkin, the pretty, old-fashioned

uniform was marvellously becoming, and the white wig 'simply sweet.'

She told him this, but he only answered "Rats," and didn't seem particularly elated by the information. Poor boy, he was just wild to tell her how he adored her, how he worshipped her fair loveliness, how passionately he longed to win her heart.

But he resolutely fought against the seductive temptation, and sternly repressing his unruly desires—which, in the present parlous state of his finances, he looked upon as little short of criminal—forcibly drove away the ecstatic thought, that of late had been haunting him so persistently, of how, if only he could pull off this 'big thing' at the races, and get clear of debt, that perhaps—perhaps before very long, when he had got his step and was a Captain—they might . . . if Phil would wait for him . . . they might. . . . But there, the race was yet to be won—the debts were still unpaid—for the present his lips were sealed.

"Why, Phil," he said, as, gliding smoothly over the polished floor, they whirled round the room, "you are quite a kiddie again, with your hair down your back like that. You used to be such a jolly kid; do you think you're as nice now, I wonder?"

"Far nicer."

"Conceit!"

"Impertinence!"

"What lovely hair you've got."

"Nonsense, you always used to call it a lion's mane."

"By Jove," he said, "that couple was very nearly into us—if it hadn't been that you've got such a jolly good mouth, I couldn't possibly . . ."

"A good mouth, Peter! . What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean you're so easy to turn—so 'handy,' one would call you, if you were a polo pony."

"Peter, I refuse to be compared to a polo pony. First you said I was like Stella, and now . . ."

"Only like her in thoroughbred-lookingness, Phil. Mind you remember to drink her health at supper, won't you?"

"Oh Peter, I do hope she'll win."

For the hundredth time they went over the chances for and against her victory.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Phillis, a little later, as they sat out between the dances, in the cool, dimly-lit verandah, "I'll go down to the paddock and give her a piece of sugar just before the race, that ought to put her in a good temper, and then she'll be sure to win."

"Well, if she does I shall be able to pay off jolly nearly all my debts right away," he told her. "I've got a buyer for Lucifer, you know, and for Bill too, I think. That's good, isn't it?"

"Oh, those dear ponies! It is hard that they should have to be sold."

"Can't be helped," he said philosophically. "I only hope I shall play them decently in the finals to-morrow. I'm afraid we can't expect to win, but we'll try to make a good fight of it. It will be my last tournament, I'm afraid. For the future I must go slow, and try to get straight."

"Good boy," she said, patting him on the arm. "I know you'll play beautifully; I love to watch you. And when they all shout 'Well played,' I'm as proud as proud."

"Phillis," he said, his face very white, taking her

hand in his and crushing it until she nearly cried out with the pain.

"What is it, Peter? Why so solemn all of a sudden?"

"Oh, nothing, dear, only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Only we've had such a jolly time together, haven't we? And I can't bear to think of your going away, and . . ."

"But I'm only going away for a month, silly boy," and she launched out into a detailed description of the Commissioner's projected tour through the jungle. "I think it will be lovely, don't you, Peter? And we finish up at the Rajah's, you know."

"That's where friend Stubbs comes on the scene again, isn't it?"

"Now, don't be horrid, Peter. He *is* a friend of mine," and she looked a little self-conscious.

Peter made an unintelligible sound.

"What do you say?" she asked.

"Oh nothing," he replied. "I won't say what I was going to. Do let's enjoy ourselves whilst we may."

"Well, there's the music now," she said. "We must go back."

"Oh, don't let's go back yet, Phil," he pleaded. "Who are you dancing with?"

"Never mind," she replied rising.

"Surely it isn't Grant again?" he said flushing. He had already seen her earlier in the evening dancing with the 'Amorous Ape,' and it made him perfectly wild.

"Peter, I will not be dictated to," she replied, as red as he. "It *is* Captain Grant as it happens. He is one of the best dancers here."

"You surely don't *like* the fella, do you?" he asked with an expression of such loathing on his face that she stared at him in astonishment. He knew perfectly well, though of course he couldn't tell her, what sort of a man this Grant was; what his ideas were on the subject of women; how he talked to them; and how, if he got the chance, he behaved towards them.

"I think he's very nice," she said obstinately; "and he dances beautifully. Come."

He was forced to submit, and, with no very good grace, escorted her back to the ballroom, where Captain Grant, smiling what Peter called his 'oily, insinuating, insufferably familiar and damnable smile,' awaited her. As he did not happen to be engaged for the next dance, Peter spent his time leaning up against the wall and frowning at Phillis, who on more than one occasion so far forgot herself as to make a little 'face' of defiance at him over her partner's shoulder.

When the time came for their next dance together she was nowhere to be found. Could it be that she meant to cut it? He searched for her everywhere without success.

Having just completed his third tour of the ballroom on this fruitless quest, he was standing solitary at an open window, looking moodily out at the clouds drifting across the moon and thinking resentful thoughts, when he heard a low, mischievous, provoking voice behind him repeating in childish sing-song a ridiculous little couplet that instantly carried him back in imagination to the shabby old schoolroom at Croyston, and an inky-fingered Phillis of fourteen—

"If all the pigs were one pig
I know who *he* would be!"

The magic words straightway melted his heart; he turned, and they were reconciled.

Later on at supper, when, once more braving her displeasure, he ventured diffidently to broach the dangerous and objectionable subject of Captain Grant, he found to his relief that in reality she was entirely indifferent to the charms of that distinguished lady-killer.

She greeted his solemnly reiterated warnings against the 'Amorous Ape' with genuine amusement, and laughingly assured him that this sudden access of brotherly anxiety on his part, although very gratifying, was absolutely uncalled for.

"All the same," she said with mischievous obstinacy just to tease him, "he *does* dance divinely, and he's perfectly sweet. . . . Give me another meringue, please."

"Perfectly sweet!" cried Peter, helping her, "that gorilla! that orang-outang!"

"Meringue-outang, Peter. That's what we must call him for the future—meringue-outang, the 'Sweet Ape!'"

And in happy laughter their last difference died.

Colonel Weir, meanwhile, delighted with the success that had attended his unique method of opening the ball, with the hilarious applause it had evoked from the guests, and the manifest mortification it had caused his brother officers, spent the remainder of the evening in filling conscientiously the *rôle* he had undertaken, playing the part of clown to the life.

He very soon succeeded in rendering himself thoroughly obnoxious to every one in the room. For not only did he consider it incumbent on him in his character of 'Promoter of fun and hilarity' to be always getting

in the way and thrusting himself in where he was not wanted, but he even went so far as to make—armed with one of those inflated bladders fastened by a string to the end of a stick, such as Jesters used to carry in days gone by—frequent assaults upon the dancers. These unoffending individuals he would facetiously flick in the face or playfully tap on the head as they came past him, his perverted little mind apparently deriving the greatest pleasure and amusement from the sight of their discomfiture.

It would have been bad enough, in all conscience, had he confined his attentions to the male portion of the community; but he made no invidious distinctions of that sort, and whacked away merrily on the heads of youths and maidens, men and matrons, with indiscriminate impartiality.

Several times had Mollie Curtis—floating round the room in the arms of adoring partners, and looking like some delicate wild-flower swaying pale and transparent in the perfumed air—been subjected to Colonel Weir's most unwelcome attentions. And she it was who first told Major Anstruther of the outrageous behaviour of his commanding officer.

"Look at him now," she whispered, as they stood for a moment at one of the doors of the ballroom, her gloved hand resting like a little white rose-leaf on his scarlet sleeve.

Anstruther ground his teeth, muttering something she couldn't catch; not words at all, she told her husband afterwards, but 'wild beast noises' not good to hear.

Punch was thoroughly enjoying himself. Having just pranced half-way through a violent two-step, he had

deposited his partner, who appeared to be in a state of collapse, on a chair against the wall, and now, concealed in the folds of one of the curtains, was engaged in preparing an ambush for the next unsuspecting couple that should pass that way. As Mollie and her partner stood watching, a stout pair, whom Punch evidently looked upon as fitting prey, approached. They were lumbering heavily round and round one another with an expression of pained and hurried determination—such as may be seen on the faces of those who run to catch trains—oblivious of all save the absorbing fact that they were engaged in the pastime of dancing, and that, do what they would, they always seemed to be a little behind the ‘Time,’ that elusive ‘Time’ which they knew it was their duty at all hazards to keep.

As they passed Punch’s curtain, intent only on carrying through the serious undertaking on which they had embarked, a treacherous foot slid out and tripped them up.

“Hanging’s too good for him,” said Anstruther, turning away in disgust. “Why, even a Red Indian has laws of hospitality that he never breaks. These are the Regiment’s guests, if you please, that he’s treating like this. He seems utterly lost to all sense of what’s fitting and right . . .” and he went on muttering to himself, just like a thunderstorm in the distance, Mollie told him, until she cheered him up by saying,

“Never mind, you dear old ‘A.’ Don’t be so cross. Come and get me some supper.”

They found a delightful little table for two, sweet with red roses, in a far corner of the supper-room.

“Mollie,” said Anstruther, looking at her with sombre eyes in which a fire seemed to smoulder, “dressed like

that, you are more lovely than all the rest of the world put together."

"Nonsense, 'A,'" she replied quickly. "For Heaven's sake, don't look so solemn—this is not a funeral. Be gay. Amuse me. Laugh."

In silence, still looking at her, he raised his glass.

"I drink to your bright eyes," he said at length.

"Oh, don't be so gloomy, 'A' dear—don't spoil it all for Mollie," she pleaded pathetically, as though she had been a child. "Isn't it good to be together? Let's enjoy ourselves and be happy. Your health, sir," and she lifted the big champagne glass to her lips, and sipped the foaming wine daintily, like a little mouse drinking. "Now, no more black looks—no more of that 'Morituri te salutant' expression. I know it's almost our last dance, and that you sail next week. But we'll see one another at home, lots and lots of times. . . . Enjoy the present. . . . 'Love well the hour and let it go' . . . We'll dance when we have finished supper; that will make you better."

Just then, the weird figure of a disreputable-looking Afridi tribesman came lurching unsteadily into the room, and sat down at one of the empty tables.

A long cloak enveloped him from head to heel, and his face was completely concealed by an enormous mask of hairy and ferocious aspect.

As he seated himself at the table, he pushed up this mask on to the top of his head in order that he might refresh himself with a little air, and at the same time with not a little brandy.

It was Colonel Kennedy.

As usual he had been indulging freely in the pleasures of the table—too freely perhaps, for he appeared to be

on the point of succumbing to his inordinate fondness for the Westshires' old brandy.

There he sat, smiling in a fatuous sort of way to himself, whilst he toyed aimlessly with his glass.

Suddenly Anstruther, who was sitting silently regarding this edifying spectacle, had an inspiration. Here ready to his hand was the means by which he might avenge the grievous slight that had been put upon his beloved regiment; by which he might, if Fortune favoured him, punish the outrageous Colonel Punch and exact payment on behalf of those who, all the evening, had been obliged to endure the insults and impertinences of the insufferable clown.

"Eureka!" he cried triumphantly.

"Bravo!" applauded Mollie. "The champagne has done you good already."

"I've got a splendid idea," he said impressively. "Punch has been rude to you; you told me he had—and to dozens of other people too. I'm going to punish him."

"Now don't go and do anything silly, 'A,'" broke in Mollie, a little frightened. "I won't have you doing anything wild and reckless, mind, on my account. I know what you are," and she put out a hand as though to hold him back.

"Listen," he said; "any one wearing that disguise of Colonel Kennedy's would be quite safe from recognition, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he would if he kept his mask down."

"Well, I'm going to borrow it from him for a bit, and go and see if I can find the Colonel. . . ."

"'A,' you mustn't. I beseech you. There'll only be a frightful row. . . ."

"No, no, dear, you needn't be afraid; trust me. I'll manage it artistically."

"Oh, do be careful, 'A,' for my sake."

"Why, Mollie, I should consider I had bungled it frightfully if he ever found out who I was. You must help me to get the dress though first, will you?"

"What fun," said she, reassured by his words, her eyes sparkling with mischief as, holding tight to his arm, she allowed him to lead her to where the bibulous Afridi was still sitting smiling into space. Arrived there, she motioned her companion to one side, and went and took her stand immediately in front of the table.

Gradually it dawned upon the fuddled intelligence of Colonel Kennedy that it was the beautiful Mrs Curtis—for whom he had always entertained a profound admiration—who was standing before him, and smiling down at him so encouragingly.

"I suppose she's taken a fancy to me all of a sudden," he said to himself. "Oh, these women, these women!" and he tried to struggle to his feet, but without success, leering a welcome to her advances.

Mollie shuddered, but quickly controlling herself, said—

"How hot you must be in that great heavy cloak, Colonel Kennedy. Why don't you slip it off until it's time to go back to the ballroom again? Let me help you."

"Good idea," was the thick reply, as with her assistance he struggled out of his fancy dress.

"Now, the mask," she went on sweetly. "I'll take care of them both for you."

As she leant over him, he laid a detaining hand on her arm, and tried to draw her towards him.

"Come and sit beside me," he said; but she shook him off, and in another moment was gone.

"Triumph!" she cried, excited and sparkling, as she bundled the things into Anstruther's arms. "Now, quick, come and put them on."

And away went this pair of conspirators through an open door into the garden, whence they presently returned, Anstruther transformed into as blood-thirsty-looking a tribesman as ever cut a throat.

A singularly appropriate dress, this, in which to exact retribution from a foe. For over the border, among the Afridis and Afghans, the blood-feud—which is very similar to the old Corsican Vendetta—is in vogue to this day.

Stealthily did that tribesman stalk Colonel Punch who was striking an attitude in one of the doorways, and, by means of a running kick, shrewdly bestowed, precipitated him headlong into the ballroom.

Great was the fury and indignation of the Colonel, but there was such a crowd round the doorway that he could not be sure whose was the sacrilegious foot that had been guilty of the impious act. Nor did any one in the neighbourhood volunteer the required information, the sympathies of all being with the Afridi.

"Oh, splendid, splendid, you did it beautifully!" cried Mollie, bubbling over with merriment as the gallant tribesman found his way back once more to her side, and stood innocently laughing and talking with her within a few yards of where Punch, fuming and fizzling away like a damp squib, was going off again and again into renewed bursts of indignation, into fresh explosions of wrath.

"That will do for the present, I think," said Anstruther. "Come, child, let us dance."

A little later in the evening, as Colonel Weir was standing at the refreshment table, trying to restore his shattered nerves and dignity with a very strong whisky-and-soda, another fearful kick suddenly lifted him off his feet and sent his glass flying.

Spluttering with whisky and indignation, he recovered his balance just in time to see the last flutter of the Afridi's cloak vanish through the doorway. Like a shot he was after his assailant, and up and down passages, in and out of rooms, they raced, till the tribesman managed to make good his escape by means of a door at the back of the building, and disappeared into the darkness.

After a fruitless search through the grounds Punch, very hot and breathless, returned to the ballroom. There he found Major Anstruther, in Mess dress, telling some apparently very amusing anecdote to a group of officers, who were all laughing consumedly.

Punch dripping with perspiration and pale with passion, came up to his Second-in-Command, and taking him on one side, unfolded at great length and with very considerable heat his tale of woe.

"No one, you may be sure," said he, puffing and blowing, "enjoys a bit of fun more than I do. But there was no fun in this. The infernal fellow kicked me really hard. Meant to hurt me. He succeeded too, bad luck to him."

Major Anstruther had . . . haw . . . never heard of such a case, and hardly knew what to advise under the circumstances.

"Which of these fellas was it that kicked you?"

he asked, with a lofty air of surprise that such an extraordinary thing could ever have happened—of infinite disdain, too, of the individual to whom it was possible that such things should occur.

"A man got up as a native it was," replied Punch, "an Afghan or something. He's disappeared."

At first Anstruther felt some scruples about sheltering himself behind, or rather letting his mantle fall both literally and metaphorically upon Colonel Kennedy, who, once more attired as an Afridi, his mask this time carefully adjusted, was sleeping peacefully at his table in the corner of the supper-room. But when he thought of the old reprobate's manner towards Mollie, and his leering look at her, these scruples vanished.

"I saw an Afridi just now . . . in the supper-room," he drawled. "A jolly good kit it was, too, I thought . . . but hot, devilish hot," he added, as Punch, acting on this information, dashed off in the direction of the supper-room, in search of his elusive foe.

It was very late now, and almost every one had gone; so the scene that followed was witnessed, fortunately for the regiment, by only a very few of the guests—and these were all sworn to secrecy before they were allowed to depart for their homes.

On reaching the supper-room, Punch at once espied his supposed assailant seated quietly by himself at a table in the far corner of the room, nodding peacefully over a drink.

He was astounded at such cool audacity, and was for a moment literally at a loss what to do.

But very soon the memory of the kicks sent him flying across to where the Afridi—all unconscious of

the impending storm—was sitting. Seizing hold of the hideous mask, he roughly tore it off, disclosing, to his intense surprise, the well-known features of Colonel Kennedy.

That this pompous old gentleman should have been guilty, even in an advanced stage of intoxication, of assaulting him was almost incredible—outrageous—maddening!

Punch's fury boiled over.

"What . . . what the devil do you mean by kicking me, sir?" he shouted, purple with rage.

Colonel Kennedy—who, of course, had not the faintest idea what he was talking about, and who by this time was very considerably more than half-seas-over—saw something irresistibly comic in Punch's infuriated visage, and throwing back his head roared with laughter.

This insult, added to the injuries he had already sustained, was more than Punch could bear.

He sprang like a tiger upon his foe, and, locked in one another's arms, the two elderly gentlemen fell struggling to the floor.

At this point Major Anstruther, who had been an interested spectator of the proceedings, deemed it wise to close the door of the supper-room—hunting away as he did so a group of ribald subalterns who were shouting encouragement to the Afridi—and the struggling colonels were left alone to find out in primitive fashion which of the two was the better man!

CHAPTER IX.

“One crowded hour of glorious life !”

NEXT day the final of the Polo Tournament took place.

Hitherto the Westshires had done uncommonly well,—far better than they had ever in their most sanguine moments anticipated.

After drawing a ‘Bye’ in the first round, they had easily defeated the Ghazipur Station team in the second; and in the semi-finals had just managed, by a very narrow margin, to get the better of the formidable Black Horse—a Native Cavalry Regiment well known in the Polo world.

But these victories had not been achieved without loss.

There were a certain number of casualties among the ponies—a tread here, a blow there, and a strained fetlock to a third.

The first two were comparatively trifling misfortunes, the victims of which, though lame, would still have to play just the same. They would go sound as soon as they got warm, was the general verdict, but the third—Anstruther’s Apollyon—would be on the sick list for weeks.

It was most unfortunate. Besides his own three,

there was only one other pony in the whole regiment that could carry Anstruther—he was such a weight—and that was Dare's country-bred, the 'Frog.'

But if Peter gave that up, which he was loth to do, as it was a very fast pony indeed, and had played splendidly against the Black Horse—in fact, it was whilst riding it he had hit the winning goal—then he himself would be short, and would have to play extra time on his other two, Lucifer and Bill, the only alternative being for him to ride a rotten pony of the Snake's that had a mouth like iron.

Lucifer had surpassed himself in this tournament. Peter had never quite realised how good he was until now. He found that he had 'the legs' of everything, even of the best of the Black Horse ponies, which were supposed to be as good as any in India. And as for riding off—he went in like a lion, and pushed everybody right out of the way quite 'on his own,' just as if he thoroughly enjoyed it.

On the eventful afternoon, as he rode on to the ground, Lucifer arching his glossy neck that shone like burnished gold in the sunlight, he felt that it was indeed good to be alive—to be in perfect health, and in hard training—with a gallant animal under him, and a hard fight before.

One of the monied subalterns of that sporting regiment, 'The Trades' Union' Dragoon Guards, with whose team they were about to do battle for the Ghazipur Polo Cup, had made him a princely offer for Lucifer, on condition that he passed the 'Vet' when the tournament was over.

Bill, too, had his admirers, and was pretty sure to fetch a good price; as was also the Frog, the big

country-bred, half English, half Arab, but born in India, that he had lent to Anstruther.

Bill and Lucifer would have rather a hard time of it to-day, he was afraid, with all the Frog's work to do as well as their own. Poor old chaps—it was bad luck. His last game on them, too!

The bugle sounded, and the ball was thrown in. Smooth and white, it came bounding over the turf, straight towards him.

Leaning over on the near-side till he was nearly out of his saddle, he hit it neatly under his pony's neck, and was away with it like a flash, before any one could interfere with him.

There was nobody but the 'Back' between him and the goal, and if only he could somehow 'slip' him, there would be a very good chance of his scoring.

It was Platt's duty, as 'One,' to look after the 'Back,' to stick to him on all occasions and ride him off, and, if possible, to frustrate all his endeavours to get near the ball. A most difficult task for anybody, and a quite impossible one for old Platitude to accomplish with any degree of success.

Not that, on this occasion, he had a fair chance. Peter had been so quick in getting away, and was now flying down the ground after the ball which, with a beautiful swinging stroke, he had sent sailing straight towards the goal.

The 'Back' he overhauled almost before he had got well started, and riding him off—the redoubtable Lucifer, indeed, pushing him right out of the way altogether—he regained possession of the ball, and, with a clean, well-directed shot, sent it flying between the posts—scoring the first goal.

Round upon round of applause from the assembled garrison greeted this achievement. The natives—a motley, moving crowd that lined two sides of the ground, among whom were conspicuous numbers of tall Sikh troopers of the Indian Cavalry, clad in spotless white—voiced their deep-throated approval.

For a moment Phillis could scarcely breathe from sheer delight: her heart beat fast with excitement.

Seated in the crowded Grand Stand, between the Commissioner and Major Denison, she was thoroughly enjoying herself.

“Wasn’t that splendid, Uncle Jimmy?” she panted, glorying triumphantly in Peter’s success.

“Yes, my dear, yes,” replied Mr Cumberledge, in his formal, pompous, kind old way. “A goal, I understand, has been struck. I see a red flag waving, and that, I am told, is the signal.”

“Right through the very middle of the goal,” exulted Miss Phillis. “I could see it quite distinctly from here. Such a good run, too, Uncle Jimmy.”

“Yes, indeed, very swift . . . a very speedy attack, Phillis. Which of them,” he droned on drowsily, “hit the goal, I wonder. Undoubtedly it was one of the Westshires, I should say. What do you think, Phillis?”

“Why, it was Peter, of course—didn’t you know?”

“Indeed, indeed! They all look so much alike to me, my dear . . . so very much alike,” he replied apologetically. “The sun-hat is a complete disguise at this distance, so far as my old eyes are concerned. So it was Dare, was it? A very dashing young fellow . . . v-ery dashing.”

“Anyhow, Uncle Jimmy, you can recognise his golden pony,” she said, smiling across at Denison.

"My dear child . . . his *golden* pony! What *do* you mean?" inquired the Commissioner bewilderedly, blinking through his spectacles.

"Yes, Lucifer, Uncle Jimmy. You must have seen him hundreds of times. See him now, over there, dear thing, pawing the ground with impatience to be off again. The sun, shining on his beautiful coat, makes him look as if he were made of pure gold."

Away flashed the players again, brilliant in their gay distinguishing colours, scarlet and green respectively, turning with the unanimity and lightning speed of a shoal of fish frightened in the shallows; chasing the white ball hither and thither, stopping it, dribbling it, passing it skilfully, hitting it on either side of their ponies, backwards and forwards at top speed over the level grass.

Wildly up and down the ground they galloped. In and out, here and there, to and fro surged the contest; far and near, high and low, flew the ball. Peter was not given another chance. Whenever he did manage to get away, which was not often, there were invariably at least two of the dragoons 'on' to him at once, and between them, perfectly mounted as they were, they always managed to wrest the ball from him.

Do what they would, the Westshires could not succeed in scoring again. And gradually the tide of battle began to turn against them, hemming them in. For now the play was almost entirely confined to their end of the ground, the ball, on more than one occasion, even going perilously near their goal.

"Well done, 'A'—good shot!" cried Denison, standing up in his excitement, as Anstruther, who was playing brilliantly, just saved the goal by a beautiful, near-side

back-hander, that lifted the ball and made it fairly whizz through the air over the heads of the players.

Platt rushed it on, but, hitting wildly, sent it out of play.

"Stick to the 'Back,' old boy, stick to the 'Back,'" implored Peter, as they lined up for the throw-in.

Easier said than done, thought Platt, as he painfully toiled in the wake of the flying 'Back.' How was he *ever* to catch him, or ride him off, or interfere with him in any way, he would like to know!

For the 'Back' of the Dragoon Guards team was superbly mounted on great big Waler ponies, which, in spite of their size, could stop and turn on a sixpence; whereas poor Platitude had to do the best he could on what he anathematised a hundred times during that strenuous game as his rotten, woebegone, old 'skins!'

"That must have been a goal, I'm afraid," said Denison dejectedly to Phillis, as the ball went out behind the Westshires' line, apparently between the goal-posts.

There was a moment's breathless suspense whilst they watched for the fatal red flag.

By this time a certain amount of dust was hanging in the air, and the sun, as it sank lower and lower, striking on this, turned it into a faint golden haze—a thin mist, through which it was sometimes rather hard for the onlookers to make out exactly what was going on.

"No," he went on at length, in a tone of relief, "it's all right. Must have been a pretty close shave though."

"Oh, I *am* so glad it wasn't a goal," said Phillis. "Aren't the Westshires playing splendidly, Major Denison! You must be proud of them."

"Yes; making a good fight of it, aren't they? Can't

hope to win, of course, still they thought those Dragoon Guard fellas would give them an awful hammering, and they're not doing *that* by any means. But it's not more than half over yet, worse luck. I'm afraid we can't expect to do so well in the second half. Short of ponies, you know."

"Oh, I *am* disappointed," said Phillis, distressed beyond measure at his gloomy prognostications. "I wish they had hundreds. I'm sure they deserve them."

"We ought to have managed somehow to raise a few more decent ones for them," he went on, half to himself. "It is bad luck being so short, especially when they are such a jolly good team."

"Why don't they get some more, Major Denison," she inquired.

"Why don't starving people eat cake, Miss Montague? Because they can't afford it," he replied, smiling at her simplicity. "We are all more or less broke, you know. If only Mr Carnegie could be induced to endow Regimental Polo Clubs—instead of those Libraries that nobody seems to want—and help needy subalterns to play polo, he would be doing a real service to the country."

"What a splendid idea! Let's write and ask him."

"I'm afraid we can't very well do that," he answered, with a laugh. "It would be rather too much like an appeal for charity, wouldn't it?"

"Not charity, Major Denison—Patriotism."

"I wonder if he would see it in that light. It really would be a splendid thing. There's nothing like good hard polo, and plenty of it, to make men of these boys who come out to join. It's the best training in the world for a soldier. Requires dash, and judgment,

and horsemanship, and pluck, and strength, and coolness, and a hundred other qualities, all very useful in the day of battle; besides. . . . By Jove, he's down," he ejaculated, breaking off abruptly, as the game came to a standstill.

They could make out a figure lying motionless on the ground beside a prostrate pony. As they watched, the animal, with a flourish of iron-shod hoofs, on which the sun glittered in a sudden flash, struggled to its feet, and careered wildly away over the ground.

"It's all right, Miss Montague; he's getting up," said Denison, reassuringly. "Don't look so frightened."

For Phillis, who had at once jumped to the conclusion that it was Peter who was down, and that at the very least his neck was broken, had gone as white as her frock.

Fortunately no bones were broken, and Platt—who, it turned out, was the hero of the incident, having somehow managed to get his mount's fore-legs mixed up with the hind-legs of the 'Back's' pony, and consequently, come on his head—got up none the worse.

At it again they went, hammer and tongs—the West-shires, now almost altogether on the defensive, repulsing attack after frenzied attack. Still they maintained their lead, and even after the fourth 'chukker,' when two-thirds of the game had been played, they had not lost it. But now the pace was beginning to tell severely on their ponies, which, though stout of heart, were few in number compared with those of the Dragoons. Peter had already played both Lucifer and Bill twice, and they were done to a turn; so he decided he had better do what he could with Seton's hard-mouthed beast for a bit, and then pull out Lucifer again to finish up with.

Anstruther, who had been doing wonders on the defensive at Back, told Peter as they rode out for the fifth 'chukker,' that he'd been having "a devil of a time of it, hitting demmed back-handers right out of the mouth of the demmed goal" all the while.

"Your Frog's a corker, young man," he went on, "as steady as a house. When their 'One' comes up alongside and tries to ride me off, he makes about as much impression as a wave does washing up against a rock."

This time, with only ten minutes more in which to gain the victory, the Dragoons—determined on the downfall of this presumptuous Infantry team—would take no denial. They were irresistible. There was no stopping them anyhow. They hit two goals in rapid succession.

Then a curious thing happened. Peter, who was 'all over the place' on his puller, and doing little or no good work for his side, managed, quite by chance, to get away with the ball. As good luck would have it, the puller's head was turned at the moment in the right direction; so giving the brute a cut with his whip, Peter drove him along for all he was worth, and for a good deal more too, and he fairly streaked down the ground. He literally seemed to leave everything standing, and before you could say knife, the red flag signalled another goal for the Westshires.

Two all.

But this was the last spark of life, the last flicker of resistance on the part of the exhausted Infantry team, which now went rapidly from bad to worse.

Peter, on his tearing, rampaging steed—which, after its brilliant exploit, had become even more out of hand

and unmanageable than ever—was most of the time out of the game altogether.

Another and another goal was scored against them, and when they rode off to change ponies for the sixth and last time, the score stood at four—two.

“Well played, Dare,” said Anstruther, as they walked their ponies out for the final tussle. Then with a laugh. “Now we’ll show them what your Lucifer is made of, eh? We only want two goals to get level, you know.”

“He’s played twice already,” said Peter, shaking his head, “and I’m afraid he’s about cooked, poor old chap.”

But in another instant, anxiety, disappointment, strain, and fatigue, were all forgotten by both man and beast. The ball was in play!

Lucifer of the lion heart sprang forward to intercept it, as gamely and readily as though he had just come fresh from his stable; and away they went down the touch-line, Peter hitting smoothly and well, with the long swing he had learnt from the natives in Rajputana, and shouting—but shouting in vain—to Platt, to ‘ride’ the ‘Back.’

But this time he was not destined to get a shot at goal.

The Dragoons ‘Three,’ whose special duty it was to watch him, was riding a big black waler that hadn’t played till now. A slashing fine beast he was, Peter thought, with an ugly head, and a raking stride, and big . . . why, he was a horse! How some of those ponies ever got their 14-1 certificates was a mystery.

This monster now ranged alongside, and came in with a frightful bump. Lucifer staggered for a second, then with a bound got his shoulder in front of his

adversary, and pushed and struggled with him, till eventually he drove him over the ball, thus preventing his rider from hitting it. Again and again did these two Paladins of the Polo Field do battle in this last few minutes. Towards the end, the black horse began to get the better of these contests—his weight and the fact that he was fresh telling heavily in his favour.

But Lucifer still stuck to it, galloping stride for stride with him, and returning bump for bump.

Anstruther, for his part, was doing yeoman service at 'Back,' repeatedly saving the situation when it seemed past praying for. Time after time did his strong back-handers drive the ball from the dangerous proximity of the goal away out to safety in the neighbourhood of the touch-line.

But all the Westshires' desperate efforts to score again were unavailing. Indeed it was all, and almost more than all, they could do to prevent the Dragoons, who pressed them hard all the time, from increasing their lead.

Still they *did* prevent them, and in spite of worn-out ponies, gamely held their own, until the sudden sound of the bugle announced the finish of the fight.

It had been a glorious game—a gallant, hard-fought struggle right up to the very end.

Peter jumped off Lucifer, and led him to where, at the edge of the ground, his other ponies with their dusky attendants—and old David, who always put in an appearance on great occasions such as this—formed a little group apart from the rest.

Lucifer's head was hanging very low, and he seemed to roll queerly in his gait.

The poor old chap's frightfully done, thought Peter.

Then he noticed that he was moving his hind-legs in a very curious fashion, lifting each in turn with a sort of spasmodic jerk.

"What's up, old boy?" he said, patting his neck, as he handed him over to one of the natives to rub down and groom.

As he spoke, the pony swayed to and fro for a moment, then fell with a crash on his side, and lay motionless, his legs stretched out stiffly.

"Good God!" cried Peter, rushing forward and flinging himself down beside him; then again, as he took the beautiful head on his knee, "Good God!"

After one brief convulsive shuddering struggle, Lucifer lay still, a thin bright stream of scarlet trickling from his mouth.

He was dead.

Feverishly they rubbed the poor stiff limbs, trying to chafe them back to life. Frantically did David rush to the Mess tent for brandy, which he tried hopefully to pour down the inert, pulseless throat, where the glad, exuberant life would throb no more. All in vain.

When there could no longer be any possibility of doubt that he was dead—when the poor, limp tongue fell forward, protruding helplessly—Peter rose and turned away.

He could not bear the sight.

Lucifer, his beloved, his splendid Lucifer was dead. And he himself was his murderer. He had killed him; ridden him to death, of course, brute that he was.

"I didn't know, old boy," he muttered huskily. "I

didn't know, or I wouldn't have done it." He walked away, as if in a dream, to where his other ponies were being rubbed down. "I must get out of this," he said to himself, as he patted Bill's black neck, and mechanically felt him and the Frog all over for possible knocks or bruises. "I must get out of this. It's more than I can stand. Old David's enough to get on any fella's nerves."

And he looked angrily across to where the old man, in true Oriental fashion, was sobbing and wailing over the dead body—the easy tears of age, that come so readily at call, coursing one another down his swarthy cheeks in 'piteous chase.'

"I'm b-b-beastly sorry," said a familiar voice behind him.

Platt had come to condole!

He set his teeth, and turned to face this fresh ordeal, steeling himself, as he did so, to withstand the torrent of platitudes, suitable to the sad occasion, that he felt sure would follow.

"Thanks, old man," he heard himself saying, civilly enough.

"He w-was," laboured Platt, with breathless solemnity, quite conscious of his inability to say anything consoling, yet loth to abandon the attempt altogether. "He w-was the flower of the flock—the b-best of the bunch—the Adam's apple of your eye."

"That'll do, Platt," snapped Peter. "Go along home, now, old chap. Adam's apple!"

"I mean the . . . the . . . the . . ."

"Yes, yes, that's all right," broke in Peter. "You mean well enough, I know, but there's nothing more to be said. He's dead. . . . And I've just got to

make the best of it. Dead," and his lips set in a thin bitter line.

"I'm b-beastly sorry—b-b-beastly sorry," reiterated Platt, blundering on like a well-intentioned steam-roller. "Now, if only you had insured him when Seton and I insured ours, you would have——"

"Well, I didn't, and there's an end of it," said Peter shortly; and he crossed over to where his trap with old Peggy in the shafts, was waiting for him.

On the way he encountered the semitic subaltern of the Trades' Union Dragoon Guards, who had been Lucifer's prospective purchaser.

"Dev'lish sorry he's dead. But lordy, what a bit of luck for me his dyin' to-day inthtead of to-morrer, ain't it. What?" said this beauty, his predatory face alight with satisfaction at his escape.

"I daresay you wouldn't be able to afford it as well as I can," said Peter politely, and passed on.

"Insured, I suppothe," sneered the Jew-boy. "What side the fellas put on to be sure. Afford it, indeed."

Just as Peter was getting into his cart, he was detained once more. This time by Captain Seton, who, with all the vulture's gift of scenting disaster from afar, had divined—whilst still in the Mess tent—that there was something 'up,' and had at once flown out to see what it was. Not content with the confused account that Platt, whom he met on the way, had given him, he rushed off to ferret out for himself further blood-curdling particulars, and, incidentally, to see how Peter took it.

"Sorry to hear of your loss, Dare," he said, seeking surreptitiously—and in vain—to discover any signs of distress in the cold, impassive face before him.

Peter, who knew exactly how much such sympathy was worth, replied suitably, but not at great length, and prepared to drive off.

"Of course he was insured, wasn't he?" went on Seton, determined to make him wince if he could.

"Insured?" said Peter, keeping his temper admirably. "Oh, no. What a humourist you are, Seton. Insured ponies never die."

Just then Anstruther came up, and at a look from him Snake slunk away.

"Give me a lift home, can you, old chap?" he said; and even if Peter had wished to refuse he could not very well have done so, for as 'A' asked the question, he swung his long body into the trap, without waiting for any reply, and began at once to talk nineteen to the dozen.

Since Major Anstruther was neither fool, nor knave, nor greedy Hebrew, but a courteous, well-bred man of the world, Peter was not harried on the way home with ill-timed commiseration, or pestered with questions about insurance.

The subject of Lucifer's death was dismissed with a brief, "'fernal bad luck, of course, but we're all 'up against it,' some time or another"; the rest of the drive being beguiled with comments on the game, unqualified admiration of the 'Frog's' galloping powers, and a hint of praise of Peter's own play.

"It's most awfully decent of him to bother about me, just because I'm down on my luck," thought Peter.

He happened to know that 'A' had arranged to go for a last drive with Mollie Curtis in her car directly the polo was over. And he felt quite certain

that there were very few among his own pals—men whom he had been accustomed to look upon as far more good-natured than the gorgeous Anstruther—who would have given up as much for him.

But Peter had not anything like got to the bottom of the Major's kindness yet. As they neared the Mess he said—

“Pull up a minute, young man. I must have a drink; my throat's like a limekiln from all the dust I've swallowed this afternoon.”

Making his own thirst the excuse, he administered a strong brandy-and-soda to his companion, who swallowed it meekly and felt all the better for it.

Then, with a good deal of humming and hawing and hesitation, he made—as he lit a very long cigar, and shrouded himself in its smoke—the following astounding proposition—

“How would it be . . . haw . . . if you took on old ‘Polly’?”

“If I . . .” stammered Peter, wondering vaguely if the brandy had got into Anstruther's head, or possibly into his own.

“I want to get him a good home, you know. Shouldn't care to feel that some demmed tailor was pulling the poor old blighter's head off—bucketing him about the roads . . . and all that,” each disjointed sentence emphasised by an enormous puff of smoke.

“But . . . but . . .” protested Peter, “isn't he for sale with your others? I saw a notice at the club.”

“No, I shan't sell him,” said Anstruther shortly, with a glare at his questioner. “In the first place, he's lame.”

"But he'll be all right again in a fortnight or three weeks, Major, at the outside. . . ."

"Well, perhaps he will, and perhaps he won't," barked Anstruther, somewhat disconcerted by these objections. "Anyway, young man, I'm on the look-out for a good home for him—will you have him?"

"It's most awfully good of you, but. . . ."

"Well, think it over, boy. I may have to shoot him, if you won't take him. . . . Seems rather a pity."

Peter gasped. He remembered the price asked for Apollyon in that notice at the club.

"Oh, but Major," he stammered, his voice not very well under control, "oh, but . . . I've never heard of anything so generous in all my life!"

"Nonsense, nonsense. I'm off on Saturday. Must fix up something for the poor old beggar before that. Here Denny," he cried, in a tone of relief, as Denison rode up to the door. "Come and persuade this obstinate young devil to take pity on old Polly, and save him from the knackers. I must be off."

And, aware that he was leaving Peter in good hands, away he went, with his inimitable swagger, clanking his long spurs in what Mollie Curtis had aptly described as his 'Bold Buccaneer manner.'

CHAPTER X.

“Fate is a sea without a shore.”

BECAUSE the Croupier calls “Red wins!” six times—or sixty times, for that matter—in succession, there is no reason whatever why the “Red” should not immediately turn up again.

This is an incontestible fact—though nobody really believes it,—and the rule holds good when applied to the daily happenings of life. The belief held by some that the occurrence of one misfortune purchases, for a time at least, immunity from ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune,’ is no less fallacious than that adopted by others who maintain that sorrows never come singly; that one calamity is sure to be but the precursor of others, and that they themselves are—as the Greeks believed in the old superstitious days when *Æschylus* wrote the *Eumenides*—pursued by the vindictive, implacable furies. Fortunately for himself, Peter belonged to the more sanguine of these two classes. He felt that in *Lucifer’s* death a toll of some sort had been exacted from him, that his tribute to the jealous gods had been paid, and that henceforward—for a while at any rate—Fortune would be sure to smile upon him.

Still, when first he wakened on this the last day of

the race-week, which was to be the gayest and busiest of all, he felt depressed to the very depths by the memory of the cruel blow that Fate had just dealt him—a blow doubly cruel, since it deprived him, at one and the same moment, not only of a valued friend, but also of a valuable animal that represented a large sum of money,—a very considerable asset in his sadly over-weighted balance-sheet.

Harassed and anxious, he lay glooming for a while on his camp bed, prognosticating evil. Then, as the sunlight came flooding into the room—the very dust motes that danced in its glad beams seeming to rejoice—his spirits rose; although it could not be said that his prospects were exactly rosy, yet somehow things no longer looked so absolutely blue.

Stella would pull him out of the hole he was in all right, he told himself. Never had she been so fit, or looked so splendid. And if only the 'timing' of her trial which had taken place a few days before was anything like correct, then there was not the smallest fear that any of the ponies she would have to meet that day would come within a mile of her.

With the exception of that slight ebullition of temper on Monday—which had proved to be quite a mild affair after all, although Platt *did* try to make out she had nearly kicked her stable to pieces—she had been as good as gold.

The half-caste 'Riding-boy'—aged about fifty!—that he had managed to get hold of when he first put her into training, was a treasure. He seemed to combine all the untiring patience of the East with a really marvellous gentleness; Stella would let him do anything he liked with her, and would follow him about

like a dog. He rather wished now that, instead of engaging a professional jockey, he had put the little half-caste up to ride her in the race . . . except that, of course, these 'Boys' never had the very faintest idea of how to ride a finish . . . and always lost their heads. No; it was probably best as it was. The jockey seemed a decent little chap; he had taken Stella for a spin of a few furlongs the morning before, and had said afterwards that she 'went like a lamb,' and didn't give him 'no back-chat whatever!' That was satisfactory anyway. Besides, it was no good worrying. What was going to be *would* be.

The creed of the Fatalist had always had an attraction for him. It sounded so restful a Faith, but was, he discovered, infinitely more difficult to practise than to preach. For a soldier it was undoubtedly an ideal belief. . . . That was, perhaps, why some of the native regiments were so good. . . . As the Indian sepoy advanced to the attack, over the fire-swept zone, he knew—or was supposed to know—for certain that his fate had long ago been decided; that it was 'written upon his forehead,' predestined, inevitable; and that, unless to one of the many bullets that flew past him, hissing so viciously, had—from all the ages—been assigned the task of laying him low, he would escape! It followed, therefore, that all protection was useless, all caution vain. Kismet. That which is written in the Book of Fate must happen. As Omar said—

"Yea, the first morning of Creation wrote
What the last dawn of reckoning shall read."

Half an hour later, Peter was down at the stables talking to Stella.

"Do be good, old girl," he said, patting her neck as she rubbed her soft nose against his coat. "Just be good for this *one* day, and to-morrow you shall kick half a dozen stalls to pieces if you like—and eat your syce into the bargain. There, that's something to look forward to!"

Just then David came to tell him that some one wanted to see him.

"Only one of my creditors, I suppose," he thought, as unwillingly he sauntered back towards the bungalow. "Might have had the decency to leave me alone for to-day, at least."

But a pleasant surprise was in store for him. On his way to the house he met, coming briskly towards him, the supposed creditor, whose red face, all aglow with pleasure, seemed literally to be cleft in twain by a seraphic, scarlet smile.

There was not another smile like that in the whole world; it was unique. And the sight of it brought back a host of crowding, happy memories of dear old Croyston, the broad, Yorkshire moors, and the brave days when he was still a boy.

Staring incredulously at the great, burly, check-coated figure before him, he broke out—

"Why, it's surely not Huckle . . . John Huckle. I must be dreaming."

The smile became, if possible, still more capacious, and his outstretched hand was seized and shaken, again and again, with moist, respectful violence.

"Glad to see you, sir. Glad to see you, Master Peter. Looking fine, you are, sir," was the big man's ecstatic greeting.

"But what are you doing in this part of the world?" asked Peter. "I thought you were a fixture in Calcutta."

"Yes, sir, that's where the Garage is, sir. Tidy little place too, sir. Thanks to you—all thanks to you, sir."

"Nonsense, man. Thanks to yourself, for being such a devilish good chauffeur."

"I should never have known nothing about cars if it hadn't been for you, Master Peter. Why, it was you taught me to drive, sir. Always a tip-top driver, you was, sir. Fair frightened Sir Peter's French 'shover' away, you did, sir. 'Vair bad,' he say, 'smash oop,' " and at the recollection, the broad, beaming countenance of John Huckle was strained to the very utmost as he indulged in a burst of Homeric laughter.

"But what brings you to Ghazipur of all places, John?" inquired Peter as they turned together towards the house.

"Came over from Pindi, I did, last night, sir, in an auto," explained John. "Six hours it took me—the roads weren't none too good. Made bold to come and see your mare run, Master Peter." Then he added shyly, "Hope you are going to win, sir."

"Hope so too," said Peter fervently. "By Jove, India seems to suit you, John. You look as fit as a fiddle. Putting on flesh too, aren't you? Here's a comfortable chair. Sit you down. Now then, fire away, and tell me all about yourself."

Thus encouraged, the burly John, nothing loth, launched out into a full and particular account of his doings.

It appeared that he and his partner had been getting on so well in Calcutta that they had made up their minds to extend their motor business. He had come up to see about starting a garage at Pindi, and expected to open in a few days. He had happened to see in

the papers a list of entries for the Ghazipur Cup, and had noticed that Lieutenant Dare's bay waler mare Stella was running. So being, like most Yorkshire men, 'fond of a bit of sport,' he simply hadn't been able to resist the temptation of coming over to see 'Master Peter show 'em the way.'

Between Peter and John there had always existed a very warm friendship.

Long ago as boys they had braved many a danger together; weathered many a storm; been accomplices in many a daring raid upon the Croyston preserves, carried out under the very nose of John's father, old William Huckle, Sir Peter's formidable Head Keeper, of whom they both stood in far greater awe than of the tempestuous old baronet himself.

Shy, clumsy, countrified John, who knew no better, had always looked upon the 'Young Master' almost as though he were a being from a different sphere; had followed him humbly wherever he went—willing, eager rather, to be ordered about and unmercifully bullied—ready at any moment literally to lay down his life for him.

One day, indeed, this more than feudal devotion of his really passed all the bounds of reason. Peter could not help feeling a queer choky sensation whenever he thought of it.

The boys had been out mushrooming together, and Peter had inadvertently eaten a large piece of what a passing gamekeeper unhesitatingly pronounced to be a toadstool. Like most children they had been brought up to look upon the words toadstool, poison, and death, as almost synonymous terms, and in consequence had felt fully convinced that he had only a very few more

minutes to live. They were badly frightened, there was no doubt about that, and this fact only rendered John's action the more remarkable; for, with a courage and determination quite extraordinary in a boy of his age, he had without a word snatched up what was left of the disastrous toadstool, and hurriedly swallowed it—preferring death itself to the risk of separation.

After an early lunch, just as Peter was getting into his dogcart with Denison to drive down to the races, a telegram was brought to him. On reading it, his face fell.

"Congratulate me, Denny," he said with a bitter laugh, "my uncle's got a son and heir—just like my luck!" and crumpling the thin paper into a ball, he threw it viciously at Eton Girl, who, blear-eyed and bulging, sat in the doorway watching their departure.

Anticipating a delicacy of some sort, the old spaniel, in the sanguine innocence of her heart, had half swallowed it before she realised that it was not good to eat; whereupon she rejected it without ceremony, looking reproachfully at Peter the while.

"She doesn't seem to appreciate the appetising morsel any more than I do, Denny," he said, taking up the reins and sending Peggy down the drive at a spanking pace. "And when a general receptacle for refuse such as she is can't swallow a thing, it must be pretty bad."

"Rot, man," said Denison. "It's only what you expected after all. Personally I think it's the best possible thing that could have happened, as far as you are concerned. It will settle you."

"Yes, that's exactly what it *will* do," snapped Peter savagely, "settle me for good and all!"

Denison laughed.

"Not that sort of settle, Juggins. I mean that now you know where you are. Till to-day you always felt it was still on the cards that you might, some time or other, come in for a lot of money, and a place, and all that. Now you know you can't, and you must behave accordingly. Probably you wouldn't be up to your eyes in debt at the present moment but for your beastly expectations."

"Oh hang it all, man, don't. . . ."

"No, I'm not going to improve the occasion, old chap. You needn't be afraid. But don't imagine that all is lost because you are not going to be Sir Peter. You'll do a lot better than just succeed to your uncle. I hope some day you'll succeed on your own."

"But it's the money, you know, Denny," said Peter, still querulous, though a little comforted by Denison's hopes for his future. "I owe such a devil of a lot."

"Oh, that will be all right. I'm sure Sir Peter would help you if you were really in a hole. No one knows the old boy better than 'A,' and he declares he's awfully fond of you, but thinks it his duty to be down on you, you know, and keep you short of money so that you shouldn't develop extravagant tastes."

"What a rotten idea."

"It isn't really altogether. You wouldn't care to be like one of those Trades' Union beauties, would you? Well, that's one of the chief causes of their awfulness, having too much money to spend when they're young."

I don't see why having a little money should turn one into a bounder; Denny, I'm hanged if I do."

"Of course it wouldn't, old chap, but all the same the principle is sound enough. Now, as we are just

passing the Telegraph Office, how would it be if you sent Sir Peter a wire—to congratulate him, you know? It would please the old boy no end.”

“Do you think I ought to . . .?”

“Of course you ought. Now, then, pull up, and I’ll come and help you.”

“I’ll offer to be godfather too,” said Peter with a burst of generosity as they stood together, a minute later at one of the desks in the dingy little office, composing their telegram.

Through the farther door they could see a number of sickly, anæmic-looking native clerks, working away industriously in the stifling obscurity of the inner room. Each of these poor travesties of mankind would every now and again turn to one of his companions, and pour forth a stream of what appeared to be passionate, and what was certainly highly gesticulatory, rhetoric—a very torrent of words.

“That’s the kind of man—the clerk, the babu—that we have to fear in India nowadays,” said Denison gravely, as they got into the trap again. “I don’t mean these miserable specimens in particular—they are not rich enough, I suppose, or well-educated enough to be formidable—but that’s the class of animal that’s causing all the unrest. Fluent talkers, prolific writers, gifted with the cleverness of the monkey, the volubility of the parrot, and the courage of the mouse, they secretly preach their hellish sedition throughout the length and breadth of India. They take jolly good care, of course, to keep out of danger themselves, the brutes, and spend all their time goading the poor, ignorant, half-witted tools of their beastly Societies, into perpetrating loathsome, abominable atrocities.”

"Damn them," said Peter comprehensively.

Among the earliest arrivals at the race-course were Phillis and placid, long-suffering Mrs Cumberledge, who had been dragged away by her impetuous charge before lunch was even half over.

Although Phillis was perfectly well aware that Stella's race was not until three o'clock, still she did not intend to run the very smallest risk of being late. She knew what Aunt Julia was, she said.

Consequently, the poor, passive old lady, had been unceremoniously bundled into her best frock, and very soon afterwards, into the big carriage—on the box of which were proudly perched two scarlet-clad retainers, whilst two more, equally resplendent, hung on behind—and driven off, in state, to the Races.

Owing to Phillis's feverish haste, they arrived far too early, and found themselves sole occupants of the large, ugly, red-brick Grand Stand that, sloping upwards, tier upon tier, like the Pyramids, dominated the scene.

Away to the right and left swept the circular Course, green and smooth, between its neat white rails.

Just opposite was the winning - post, beside the judge's box.

On the far side, owing to a fold in the ground, the Course, for quite a considerable distance, was invisible from the Grand Stand; and again to the right, near the bend, it dipped out of sight once more.

Not an ideal Course by any means; constructed under the very greatest difficulties, and only after well-nigh insuperable topographical obstacles had been overcome. But now, nursed and rolled and loved and watered,

with an enthusiasm worthy of a better cause, by the tireless devotees of that most doubtful, most shady, most degenerate of all Eastern sports—racing.

"I've brought my bribe for Stella," said Phillis, as the eventful hour drew near, eagerly displaying to Peter's amused gaze two lumps of sugar that glistened snowily in her hand. "We'll go down to the paddock and give it to her just before the race. Oh," for the millionth time, "I do hope she'll win! And Peter . . . Peter, I can't say anything now, with all these people about . . . but I *am* so sorry about Lucifer. You poor old boy—dear Lucifer," and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"Don't, Phil," he said, looking away. "It's sweet of you, but I don't want to talk about it just yet. Time enough after to-day."

"That's right, Peterkin," she said, smiling up at him; "right and brave; always a brave boy, dear."

She was much interested in hearing of the arrival of their old friend John Huckle, and made Peter take her across to where the massive figure of the big Yorkshireman made pigmies of the crowd.

"It's a good omen," she said, "his coming to-day. He'll bring us luck."

Then later, they made their way to the paddock, where with the other runners for the Cup, Stella, in her most saintly mood, was daintily pacing round and round the ring.

As the graceful creature, gentle and lamb-like, lowered her lovely head to take the sugar, Phillis kissed the white star on her forehead, and whispered softly—

"You'll go like the wind, won't you, you beautiful darling, and beat them all!"

With hopes high burning they stood watching her, slim greyhound that she was, as she walked down towards the starting - post — switching her long tail, arching her pretty neck, snatching playfully at her bit, preening herself like a peacock before the eyes of the assembled crowd.

"The vanity of the creature!" commented Phillis laughing.

"Vain as a woman," said Peter sententiously.

"Vain as her master," replied she.

"Rats!" he exclaimed.

"Mice!" she retorted. "Come. Just look at the crowd in the Grand Stand. We shall have to fight for a place after all!"

Stella was left at the post.

There had been several false starts — all caused by a half-broken, impetuous, yellow, ewe-necked, Country-bred,—and the angelic mood in which Peter's paragon had gone down to the starting-post had given place to one of fretful impatience, which had rapidly developed into wild, tearing, unreasoning fury.

On being pulled up for the third time, she had reared viciously — striking out with her fore-legs at the horse next to her—and had come within an ace of over-balancing.

Skilfully her jockey, gentling her the while, had coaxed her back again into her place; and the starter, seeing that at last he had got all his horses into something like a decent line, had let them go.

Away, abreast, sped all the swift, beautiful, glowing animals—all save Stella.

As the flag fell, back went her ears, down went her

head; rigid and immovable, she stopped dead in her tracks; then whipped round, and lashed out furiously.

After this, she seemed to brace herself for a struggle, standing there, with rounded back and staring eyes—obstinate refusal to do anything that was required of her in every quivering line of her beautiful body. For some time the occupants of the Grand Stand—from which, owing to the formation of the ground, the start itself was not visible—remained in ignorance of what had occurred.

“I can’t see through these beastly glasses,” said Peter. “You’ve altered the focus.”

And Phillis had to confess that she had altered it, “a tiny little bit.”

By the time the glasses were adjusted sufficiently to enable him to make out the colours, the horses were out of sight again, in the dip, near the bend.

“Wasn’t that Stella leading?” he asked breathlessly. “My Red-and-Blue, surely, wasn’t it?”

Phillis didn’t think it was. . . . Green-cap, she fancied, was in front . . . with something, that perhaps might be Red-and-Blue, close behind. . . . Eagerly they watched the corner round which the horses would next appear. Hours seemed to go by! Phillis felt sick with apprehension—fearing yet longing to see them.

Suddenly she gave a cry, catching her breath painfully as the cluster of rapidly-moving little figures—which even at that distance gave the effect of supreme effort—swept round the bend into the ‘straight.’

Where was Red-and-Blue? . . . Next to the rails she could make out Green-cap . . . then Yellow-sleeves . . . then a grey horse, and behind, in the dust, three others. . . . But no Stella.

They were past now. They were gone. The race was over.

Phillis swayed a little, and clung to her companion for support.

Standing beside her, apparently unmoved, but with lips very white, Peter continued gazing down the course through his glasses—stunned, incredulous, still looking, and looking in vain, for Stella.

CHAPTER XI.

“There is no armour against Fate.”

HEEDLESSLY life sweeps on—relentless—inexorable.

Dinners must be eaten, dances danced, engagements kept, though Empires fall and Dynasties decay.

That evening, poor Phillis, who felt far more like going to bed and crying her eyes out than taking part in any further festivities, was borne off by Mrs Cumberledge to a big farewell dinner given by the Curtis' in honour of Major Anstruther, who was leaving next day for England. This dinner was to be followed by a dance in the beautiful Club ballroom, where the floor was like undulating ice, and dancing on it a foretaste of Paradise. A gay and fitting wind-up to the gay Week's dissipations.

Phillis knew that Peter was to have been present at the dinner. But his chair was empty, and Denison, who took her in, explained that he was coming on later, “poor old chap.”

Before leaving him in the afternoon she had extracted a promise from him that he would come to the dance without fail, if only for a little while, as it was the last chance she would have of seeing him before she went out into the Jungle.

She was very miserable about him. . . . He seemed

so reckless and hard and queer. Everything was going wrong with him, poor boy. . . . And when Denison told her about the telegram that announced the birth of a son and heir to Sir Peter, she thought hopelessly, "This is the last straw."

What *could* she do to help or comfort him. . . . How useless a girl was . . . how feeble.

With difficulty she kept back the tears that all the evening had been so perilously near her pretty eyes.

"Don't look so unhappy, Miss Montague," said Denison, sympathetically; "things aren't really quite so bad. I know old Sir Peter will come to the rescue all right. Major Anstruther is going to look him up, you know, the day he lands, and square matters for our young scapegrace. And then, you'll see, he'll make a fresh start . . . and be steady and careful and good and respectable, and . . . very dull, for a time—after which he will break out again in some other direction."

"Oh, Major Denison," said Phillis solemnly, her great, grave, pleading eyes wide with anxiety, "I'm *sure* . . . if he could only have another chance. . . ."

"Don't promise impossible things for him," broke in Denison with a smile; then added a little wistfully, "He has a staunch champion in you, Miss Phillis."

Phillis blushed.

"Poor boy," she said, "he has need of all his friends just now."

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and the last bars of the sixth waltz were just dying away, as Phillis, the tips of her fingers resting on Captain Grant's sleeve, came out of the ballroom into the verandah, stood looking for a

moment into the darkness, and then seated herself under the big light near the main entrance.

She had told Peter she would keep four dances in the middle of the programme,—beginning at number seven,—and now she was wondering and wondering if he had arrived . . . and hoping and hoping he would soon come and find her.

Restless and preoccupied, she answered her partner at random, incapable of pretending even an interest in his self-satisfied small-talk. The Amorous Ape—who looked upon himself as quite irresistible where the fair sex was concerned, and who had hitherto flattered himself that ‘little Phillis Montague was deucedly taken with him,’ not unnaturally perhaps, since in her utter indifference to everything that night, she had allowed him to put his name down for several dances—became rapidly more and more incensed. . . . He was not accustomed to such treatment from his partners . . . by Jove he wasn’t!

At length, he blurted out brusquely—

“What’s the matter with you, Miss Montague? Is there anything wrong?”

Poor Phillis, only too ready to pour out her woes to any one who would be kind enough to listen, and far too unsophisticated to know that confidences of any sort are always best withheld from men like Captain Grant, told him how anxious she was about Peter. . . . What a terrible blow Stella’s defeat had been to him. . . . How she had persuaded him to come that night . . . “not to dance, of course, but just to sit out,” as she was going away next day into the jungle, and “wouldn’t see him again for ever so long. . . .” And how she was afraid that, perhaps, after all, he hadn’t been able to manage

it, as the music was beginning . . . and. . . .
"Perhaps," said Grant, an ugly look on his sneering, simian countenance, "perhaps you would like me to go and search for him for you?"

"Oh do," she replied ingenuously. "That is kind."

Her frank acceptance of his sarcastic offer—implying, as it did, perfect readiness on her part to dispense with the privilege of his companionship—further roused his ire.

Muttering something unintelligible, he rose, and left her sitting solitary—a slim, forlorn figure, under the big lamp.

Never for one instant did he entertain the idea of complying with her innocent request that he should go in search of her missing partner. *That* was entirely out of the question, of course . . . "a bit too much to expect!" In fact, in his fatuous presumption, he considered it "beastly cheek" her asking him.

Filled with noble and chivalrous thoughts such as these, he made his way, by a short cut across the grass, towards the refreshment tent, intending to get a cigarette and a 'peg' to soothe his ruffled feelings, and restore his usual complacent equanimity.

He was half-way across the lawn when, as luck would have it, he almost ran into Peter, who was moodily striding along in the direction of the ballroom.

At the sight of the trim, upright, soldier-like figure in Mess dress, all that was worst in the Amorous Ape rose to the surface.

"I'll put a spoke in his wheel for him," he said under his breath; then added, with increasing venom, "and in hers too!"

"Here, I say, Dare," he called out peremptorily, "do you generally cut dances?"

At the sound of the hated voice, Peter stopped dead, his eyes blazing.

He was in a wild reckless mood.

His only reason for being at the dance at all was that he had promised Phillis he would go. And now that he was there, the laughter—the bright lights—the gay, intolerable music—drove him almost distracted.

Hopeless of the future; disgusted with the present; indignant at the past; his nerves all on edge, he was discordantly—agonizingly—out of tune with his surroundings.

"My last partner," announced Grant, "has commissioned me to come and find you. Not that she's particularly keen on dancing with you, of course; in fact," he went on insufferably, impelled by an overmastering desire to injure in some way 'this precious pair of innocents,' "in fact, she made it pretty clear that she would far rather sit it out in some nice dark corner with me, ha ha! But she saw I wasn't for it. To tell you the truth, I was getting rather bored with charming Miss Phillis. . . ."

"Don't dare to mention her name, you hound," broke in Peter, furious at his abominable insinuations.

"Just you be careful how you speak to me," blustered Grant. "Remember I'm your superior officer." Then, jeeringly, "Not mention her name, indeed . . . why, she makes no secret of the fact that she would willingly change it for mine!"

"Shut up, you damned liar, another word and I'll knock you down!" hissed Peter through clenched

teeth, scarcely able to keep his hands off him. Startled at his violence, Grant shrank back. Then, evidently thinking himself perfectly safe—protected by his superior rank—he ventured on one last jibe.

“You needn’t be jealous,” he sneered, looking as he spoke—his teeth bared in a malicious snarl—like some obscene beast of prey. “I’m quite off her, and you’re welcome to my leavings. I shan’t lose my night’s rest on her account—the little jade!”

Crash.

Thud.

Peter struck him between the eyes, and he fell to the ground and lay motionless.

At that moment Platt, who had been refreshing himself with a cigarette in the garden, and who had seen with consternation this most regrettable occurrence, rushed up and seized hold of Peter by the arm.

“What are you doing? Are you mad?” he cried.

But Peter took no notice of the question, and shaking off the restraining arm, strode away without a word into the darkness.

Platt stood for a moment quite at a loss as to what he ought to do. Here was this infernal fellow Grant lying senseless on the garden path, and at any moment somebody might come out of the ball-room and see him! If only he could carry him away and hide him somewhere. . . . He wondered vaguely whether Peter had killed him . . . and what would happen. It never occurred to him to feel a spark of sympathy for the insensible victim of Peter’s wrath.

“He’s deserved a thousand hammerings,” he said to himself, “and I’m jolly glad he’s got one at last. But

there'll be trouble for old Peter, I'm afraid, over it. . . . He's mad to-night, mad. . . ."

"Here, I say, let me help you up," he went on, going forward as Grant began to show signs of returning consciousness. "Feeling better now, are you? That's right."

"You . . . you saw that, Platt?" stammered Grant, sitting up and looking round in a dazed manner. "You saw Dare strike me. . . . You were there . . . you must have seen him. . . . Didn't you, now?"

"W - well, y - yes. . . . I suppose I did see something of the sort," admitted Platt, reluctantly.

"Did you, or did you not?" snapped Grant, rising to his feet, and wiping away with his handkerchief a thin stream of blood that was flowing from a wound in his forehead.

"Y - yes, I did," growled Platt sullenly, furious at being obliged to acknowledge it, "but it was your own fault. . . . What did you want to go and say that sort of thing to him for?"

"Oh, you heard what I said . . . did you?" inquired Grant, rather taken aback.

This would never do. A witness to the blow was what he wanted, not evidence as to the cause of the quarrel.

"Yes, I did," said Platt, "and I thought it an infernal shame. Naturally, he's pretty sick at his mare being beat . . . who wouldn't be?"

"What do you mean?" asked Grant, pricking up his ears. "What did you hear me say?"

"Oh, something about losing . . . and that she was a jade. So she is. I know I wish *I* hadn't backed her. She was simply bound to win if she'd only started.

Jade's just the word for her. But what the blazes is the good of rubbin' it in to old Peter? . . . He's mad to-night . . . mad, I tell you. It would be . . ." he stammered, "it . . . it would b-be awfully decent of you t-to overlook that . . . that little outburst of his, I know's he's . . . he's awfully sorry about it b-by now . . . and he'll be round f-first thing in the m-morning to apologise for having lost his c-con-founded temper . . . I say," looking at Grant doubtfully, "I s-say, I hope your forehead's not very b-bad, is it? Let me go in and get your coat, shall I, and we'll g-go home. C-can I tell old Peter then," he went on with well-intentioned persistency, when he had retrieved the coats, "that you're . . . that you're not going to make a row about it . . . er . . . er," with an obvious effort, "old c-chap. It would be devilish good of you . . . devilish good."

Now, by this time Captain Grant had quite made up his mind what part in the little drama he meant to play.

Through the irony of fate, too, it was poor old Platitude's blundering interpretation of what he had overheard that had first put the idea into his head—that had actually given him his cue.

"You can tell him," he replied viciously, "if you want to tell him anything, that I'll be even with him yet!"

"Oh, I s-say . . . you're surely n-not goin' to report it officially, are you? It would make such a b-beastly scandal, you know. F-for the sake of the regiment. . . ."

"Just you shut up, young Platt. When I want your advice I'll ask for it. All you've got to do is

to remember, in case your evidence should be required, just exactly what happened. . . . How, upon my making a perfectly harmless remark about a racehorse, you saw Dare strike me in the face with his clenched fist, and knock me down. Take care you don't forget it. What's more," he went on threateningly, "see that you don't get the facts jumbled together and mixed up in your mind."

"Hang it all," said Platt indignantly, "you talk as if you thought I was going to lie about it."

"No, no, I'm quite sure you wouldn't do such a thing."

"I should think not indeed. But I s-say. . . . I hope you're n-not going to drag me into it . . . as a witness, or anything of t-that sort. Dare's m-my greatest pal, you know. . . ."

"Well, I suppose that won't prevent your speaking the truth, will it?"

"N-no, of course not. But I . . . I say. . . ."

Grant turned angrily away.

"Oh, I can't stay here all night, listening to your rubbish. Go to bed—and remember!"

CHAPTER XII.

"The busy days, the peaceful nights
Unfelt, uncounted, glided by."

ON the morning after the dance Phillis was up as soon as it was light, ready to set out for the wonderful jungles about which she had heard so many tales.

The Commissioner, most of whose work lay in the 'District,' was, with no little pomp and ceremony, going into camp that day, and the ladies were to accompany him.

Mrs Cumberledge's last words to Phillis on going to bed had been, "We shall have to start very soon after daybreak, my dear, so mind you are up ever so early, or you'll be left behind."

In spite of the threat, none of the party had yet put in an appearance when Phillis, ready for the road, in a light habit and a sun-hat, reached the hall.

On going out into the verandah she discovered that their ordinarily trim and peaceful garden had been converted during the night into a veritable Pandemonium.

Pack-mules were everywhere kicking and squealing, doing their best—as often as not with complete success—to get rid of the loads that had just been fastened on them. Mule-drivers were everywhere struggling with their refractory animals, and inci-

dentally with one another; at the same time filling the flower-scented air with shrill vituperation. Drivers of bullock-carts were loading their queer, antediluvian-looking vehicles, shouting all the while execrations on their placid, mild-eyed bullocks, which looked, Phillis thought, exactly like life-size editions of those toy animals whose heads come off, and whose bodies are filled with chocolates. Poor, suffering bullocks of India; cruel is their fate. Guided by means of a string through the tenderest part of their noses, and forced to work and to pull their carts by the simple if barbarous expedient of having their tails twisted.

As she stood watching this motley and vociferous gathering, a tall Pathan with well-oiled locks came slowly up the drive leading a string of camels.

Phillis, who had never before, as far as she could remember, seen a camel except in the Zoo, gave a little cry of delight, so majestically did they sail along like stately battleships, each in the other's wake.

Their driver, on reaching the house, marshalled them into line and made them lie down. Having accomplished this manœuvre—not without much angry bubbling in protest on the part of the camels, whose queer supercilious faces seemed, she thought, to look down upon the world with an expression of unutterable contempt and loathing—he next induced them to submit to the indignity of being loaded up with tents.

Never, she told herself as she watched the biggest and crossest of the camels trying to get rid of his load, would she have believed it possible for any face, animal or human, to express such baleful and malignant hatred. It quite frightened her.

Going back into the house, which was by this time

full of the bustle of departure, she seated herself in a secluded corner of the drawing-room whence she could look out over the misty gardens, and there waited for the Cumberledges to come down.

Her thoughts went back to the night before.

What a long time she had sat under the big lamp in the verandah before Peter had come to claim his dances. And when at last he had put in an appearance he had been depressed and silent and absent-minded, and altogether most unsatisfactory. Poor boy! How unkind Fate had been to him! Never was there such a run of bad luck!

Only once, whilst they sat out together, had he shown anything approaching animation or interest, and that was when she mentioned the name of Captain Grant.

"Did you really send him for me?" he asked.

And she had been obliged to confess that she had been guilty of that enormity . . . and that she was very sorry.

"Not nearly so sorry as he is, you may be quite sure of that!" had been his unexpected reply, accompanied by a laugh—such a hard, mirthless, un-Peterish laugh. It had frightened her.

Poor boy, he was not himself—not himself at all. Utterly wretched and disheartened he had been. She had tried in vain to cheer him, but he had seemed somehow to be beyond the reach of sympathy, as though condemned to dree his weird alone.

And then, suddenly, an insistent partner had appeared who vowed it was the eleventh dance, and she had been borne away with only just time to bid him the most hurried of miserable farewells; with only just time to press his hand very hard; to beseech him to

cheer up; to ask him to write to her; and to whisper good-bye.

She had met with no response; he had just stood looking, and looking, and looking at her with hungry, bitter eyes.

And when at the door of the ballroom she had turned to wave him a last farewell, she had seen him still standing there under the big lamp, pale and motionless,—hostile almost,—gazing at her.

Was he angry with her? What had she done? How unkind it was of him! Perhaps he didn't want to be friends any more.

Suddenly she realised with a pang of dismay what the loss of his friendship—a friendship she had until now taken so very much for granted, held in such very careless esteem—would mean to her.

"No, no!" she cried, in the stress of her emotion speaking the words aloud.

"Yes, yes," came the reply, startling her from her reverie, and looking up with a gasp she encountered the kindly eyes of Mr Cumberledge beaming at her through his spectacles. "Dreaming, Phillis?" he inquired, smiling down at her. "What vision was it, I wonder, what goblin's request, to which you were saying 'No, no,' so vehemently?"

Covered with confusion, Phillis could think of no reasonable explanation to give.

"Don't tease me, Uncle Jimmy," she said, begging the question, the tears coming into her eyes, and her heart beating strangely, uncomfortably fast. "I was half asleep, I think, and you startled me."

"Well, you'll have to wake up now, my dear; we must get under weigh at once," and the kind old

gentleman patted her cheek, signifying by this action, without any embarrassing speeches, that he saw she was troubled about something, and was sorry for her.

At first their road ran through open, fertile country, where numbers of scantily clad villagers could be seen working in the fields.

These leisurely tillers of the soil were engaged in irrigating their small plots of land by means of numerous shallow streams which, cunningly coaxed along artificial channels between low mud banks, led from some sheltered well in the neighbourhood, whence the water was laboriously raised in buckets—a tedious task!

Then on through a wood and over a bridge, where they stopped for a minute to look down at the brown sun-dried fields which reached right away uninterruptedly, save for an occasional mango grove, to the horizon.

On either side of the broad, straight, dusty road grew green, shady trees, forming an avenue that stretched in never-ending line as far as the eye could reach.

“What countless hosts of wayfarers,” thought Phillis, “must have been grateful for their shade”; and she looked at the continuous stream of traffic along the road—grim-looking, dust-begrimed men striding along; meek women who hid their faces from the world; ancient bullock-carts, with creaking wheels made of one solid piece of wood, that seemed to belong to a bygone age when pre-historic man wrought his stone weapons, and mammoths and dragons were in their prime; all journeying slowly somewhither, through the choking dust, in the burning, golden sunlight.

After a while their path lay along a narrow side-track; and leaving behind them the broad main road, with its noise and dust and throng of travellers, they cantered for several miles over ground that gradually rose until they reached the edge of the forest.

From there, looking back, they could see, for ever so far, the bare, smooth country, stretching away in level lines like the sea, till lost to sight in the dust and smoke and haze of the distance.

The forest itself was a joy and a wonder—impenetrable seemingly, and dark and dim and ghostly.

Phillis, peering fearfully into its depths, as they rode along the outskirts, pictured to herself a thousand awesome monsters; and more than once imagined that she actually saw some savage denizen of the jungle, which, however, always proved on investigation to be nothing more formidable than the stump of a tree or a fallen bough.

Hurrying on, for the sun was now beginning to get hot, they reached a point where a broad belt of the forest had been cut away. This, Mr Cumberledge explained to her, was done to prevent forest fires—very terrible things indeed—from spreading in all directions, and doing enormous damage.

Up the centre of this grassy glade ran their pathway, sloping up and up until it reached the summit of the rise.

They trotted steadily up this steep incline, and from the top could see, far off, among the wooded slopes, their camp—its white tents standing out clearly against the dark-green background of the trees; the smoke from its numerous little fires rising in straight, grey columns into the still air.

It was a quiet, peaceful life they led in the jungle.

The Commissioner was busy nearly all day long hearing cases, interviewing natives, administering justice, and righting wrongs: whilst Mrs Cumberledge, who thoroughly enjoyed this 'dolce far niente' existence, and was thankful to escape for a while from her social duties, and from the harassing cares of housekeeping, spent most of her time in slumber.

She was not a sporting woman, as are so many Commissioners' wives, who frequently have shot even more tigers than have their lords and masters—which is saying a good deal—and she dearly loved peace and quietness. Consequently Phillis was left almost entirely to her own devices.

In the still beauty of the early mornings, through the wildly luxuriant jungle, when trees and ferns, foliage and undergrowth, were all saturated with dew, she used often to ride out in order to see the first rays of the rising sun come over the hill-top and struggle through the thickly interwoven branches, setting fire, as it were, to the forest—lighting up, as if by magic, many a dew-laden spider's web until it sparkled like a delicate network of diamonds, and transforming countless floating threads of gossamer into strings of glittering gems.

In this shower of light every leaf quivered, gleaming like an emerald; every blade of dew-spangled grass shone like frosted silver.

Once, during one of these lonely rides, in an open space in the forest, she came suddenly upon a peacock, dancing alone in the sunlight; displaying with pardonable pride his manifold perfections, spreading his gorgeous tail, strutting and bowing, and preening his feathers.

Sheltered from sight by a thick mango tree, she sat

motionless on her horse, scarcely daring to breathe lest he should fly away. And presently she made out the dim forms of three—no, four—rather smaller birds, of sad-coloured plumage, half hidden, as befitted the modesty of their sex, in the long grass, but evidently interested spectators of the performance.

Suddenly, from out the jungle beyond, with an ear-piercing screech, a second peacock appeared—thirsting for battle, brilliant with iridescent blue and green and gold; looking indeed, in miniature, more like one of those ancient Spanish galleons, 'fierce marvels of monstrous art,' than a modern twentieth-century fowl—and fell upon the dancer.

To and fro they struggled with much screaming and flapping of wings; pecking and striking at one another with their spurs—a very swirl of feathers.

Meanwhile, indifferent, the hens looked on. Then, before either had gained the victory, something—possibly a common foe—disturbed them, and, rising heavily, they all flew away together and disappeared.

To Phillis, this life that they were leading in camp was one of absorbing interest. To no one who is blessed with a love of nature, or a spark of imagination, can the jungle ever be dull.

Occasionally, in the mornings, she would accompany Mr Cumberledge on one of his numerous tours of inspection; but he was a busy man, and could not always take her, so it came about that more often than not she rode out alone.

A reliable old native orderly had been told off to keep her always in sight during these expeditions, so she was not altogether unprotected. Sometimes she would mischievously try to escape from him, to shake him off, but

always without success. Wherever she went, whether speeding on her sleek grey Arab over the short, wet grass, scattering the dew in showers, or loitering dreamily beside a favourite stream that boiled and seethed its way through a narrow cleft in the rocks, the tall, bony figure of the old Sikh—a gaunt shadow, ever in the distance, like some dusky Don Quixote—followed and watched over her.

Hitherto her wanderings had been confined mainly to the forest roads and to the neighbourhood of the camp; consequently, beyond her experience with the peacocks, she had seen but little of the wild life of the jungle. A few deer there were, and pheasants; and once she thought she saw a snake, not very close, and what the orderly had *said* was a wild boar, still farther off.

So one day she determined to take her courage in both hands, and, protected by her careful escort, to explore a distant, low-lying tract of thick jungle she had often seen from the pathway, near which roared a water-fall—deep in the forest.

On this occasion the orderly, who like most natives had the heart of a child and thoroughly enjoyed an adventure, rode beside her, and assuming the duties of guide, pointed out to her objects of interest.

Here a stag had been rubbing the velvet off his horns against a tree stump, there a bear had spent the night, and here, in an awed whisper, was the footprint of a tiger!

Phillis was thrilled by these blood-curdling communications; but the excitement she felt was as nothing compared with that which took possession of her when her companion, turning suddenly in his saddle, touched

her on the arm, and holding up a finger for silence, pointed to a tree just beyond the waterfall.

At first she could see nothing, and just at that moment two frightened hinds came crashing through the jungle and startled her; but looking again at the tree, she managed at length to make out . . . a shape . . . a dim form which lay like a great black and yellow snake along an overhanging bough, then slid rapidly and noiselessly to the ground and disappeared. It was a leopard!

He had evidently been stalking the hinds which they had seen scampering away.

Poor things! she was glad they had escaped.

Breathless with suppressed excitement—feeling oddly enough just exactly as if she had been plunged unexpectedly into ice-cold water—she sat gazing at the spot where the leopard had last been visible. Then hearing a noise behind her she started round, with difficulty repressing a cry of alarm, only to find to her inexpressible relief, that it was nothing more terrifying than the orderly's old horse, which had apparently been trying to go to sleep standing up, and had very nearly fallen on his head in the process.

After this adventure Phillis received strict injunctions from the Commissioner to confine herself to the roads and to the open country, and on no account to venture into the depths of the forest.

At length the time came for them to strike camp, and march to the distant railway which was to carry them south to the Hardwar district, where they were to join a party of friends—the guests of a fabulously wealthy Indian prince, with whom they were going to stay for a week's Elephant-Catching.

For a very long time Phillis had been looking forward to this week. Only once every five years, they told her, was the capture of wild elephants permitted in these jungles, so she might consider herself very lucky indeed to have a chance of witnessing such an unusual sight. Their host, the Maharajah, it appeared, kept a pack of fifty elephants which would hunt a wild elephant through the jungles just as a pack of hounds hunts a fox.

She had, of course, read accounts of Keddahs, in which the wild elephant was driven into some kind of a palisaded enclosure, but this was evidently to be something quite different.

One of her informants, a light-hearted subaltern, had airily assured her that the wild tusker was first 'put up' by beaters, then galloped to a 'standstill' and captured, after which he was dragged back to camp 'with a rope round his neck like a little dog.'

How much of this was true she, of course, could not say, but that there was something in it she learned from a grave and enthusiastic young forest officer, who was kind enough to undertake her instruction in Jungle Lore in general, and in the capture of wild elephants in particular. He seemed, good youth, to be quite prepared to hold forth learnedly to any extent, especially on the subject of the elephants.

"Since there is no necessity," he said, "for an elephant in his wild state to stalk his prey like a tiger in order to provide himself with a meal—seeing that all he has to do when hungry is to pull down and devour the nearest tree—it follows that he is not daily compelled, like most wild animals, both hunters and hunted, to take continuous violent exercise. Consequently, he

becomes enormously fat. On the other hand, the tame elephants—the Maharajah's 'pack'—are kept in strict training, fit and hard, without an ounce of superfluous flesh, in order that they may be able to run down and capture the wild ones."

She gleaned all these particulars during dinner on the first evening of their arrival. This meal, which was served in a gorgeous marquee, the dimensions of which, she thought, rather resembled those of a cathedral than of an ordinary tent, was a triumph of skill and organisation. In the midst of the jungle, far from all civilisation, they found themselves provided with an elaborate and excellently cooked dinner that would have done credit to a London restaurant.

It seemed as though it must be done by magic, as if one of the old stories from the 'Arabian Nights,' in which the Jinns used to perform such miracles, had come true.

After dinner, as she was sitting with several of the ladies of the party outside the big marquee, which towered above them in the moonlight, discussing the doings of the day and the plans for the morrow, she saw Mr Cumberledge, accompanied by a sturdy, self-confident-looking figure that she seemed to recognise, coming towards her.

"Phillis, my dear," said Uncle Jimmy as he reached her side, "here is the latest arrival—an old friend of yours."

It was Stubbs. Captain Horatio Stubbs of the Trades' Union Dragoon Guards! Stubbs, still in the clothes in which he had travelled, too. Such clothes! A coat that cried aloud to Heaven for vengeance upon its designer, its cutter, and most of all upon its abandoned wearer; such a pattern, such a check, skirts very full,

waist very tight; and then the breeches, *they* seemed to strike a still more poignant, a more piercing, note in the discordant medley.

What a contrast was this blatant modern figure to the noiseless, white-robed native servants who flitted about like phantoms in the moonlight. But Phillis, being a girl, and like most girls blind to errors of taste in matters of masculine apparel, saw little or nothing of all this; she could not help feeling, of course, that there was something wrong with his appearance, that he did not seem exactly to blend with the beautiful eastern scene, but she resolutely shut her eyes to the fact, and remembered only that he was an old friend who had always been kindness itself to her, and that she was very glad indeed to see him again.

"Oh, how do you do, Captain Stubbs," she cried, rising from her seat and shaking hands with him. "This is nice."

She always had a soft spot in her heart for Stubby. He was so kind, and good-natured, and enthusiastic, and . . . attentive. He always seemed to think such a lot of her opinion too, and used to hang on her words, and be so deferential. Of course no one could call his manners . . . exactly polished. But she infinitely preferred them, she was sure, to lots of people's—to Captain Grant's, for instance, or to Captain Seton's, and *he* was an Honourable, so ought to be all right, she supposed, though Peter always called him 'an obsequious snake.'

"Er . . . I say, Miss Montague," Stubbs was stuttering, standing before her, square and solid in the moonlight. "I say . . . I hope you're comin' with *me* to this . . . er, what-d'ye-call-it . . . Keddah, to-morrow."

"Well," replied Phillis temporising, "I'm not quite sure yet what arrangements have been made. By the way, what is the real meaning of this word Keddah? I always thought it meant driving wild elephants into some sort of a pen, and shutting the door; but apparently it doesn't at all."

"Funny thing. I thought that too," jerked out Stubbs. "But one of these Forest Johnnies—a poverty-stricken lot they seem to be, with not a 'bob' between 'em—told me Indian word Keddah meant Catchin'. Any sort of catchin', you know; bird-lime or salt on the tail even. Ha . . . Ha."

Stubbs had an awful laugh—sudden and raucous, mirthless and coarse,—a laugh that was an insult.

Now it went echoing and re-echoing down the dim vistas of the woods, making night hideous.

To Phillis it seemed as though the tranquil picture—at which she had been dreamily gazing—of moonlit aisles stretching away into the distance between the serried ranks of trees that formed the stately pillars of this vast temple of the forest, had been suddenly shattered, as might a picture reflected in the still mirror of a pool be shattered by the rude disturbance of its surface.

She shrank from her companion, ashamed for the moment, before all these strangers, of his boorishness, experiencing that odd vicarious shame that is so often felt quite unreasonably by the sensitive, on account of any one who is guilty in public of a solecism, an awkwardness, an abandoning, voluntarily or involuntarily, of the beaten track worn by custom and usage; for the parson who forgets his text, for the actress suffering from stage-fright; perhaps more than all for the singer who, with obviously no right to be on

the platform at all, inflicts excruciating tortures on his audience, who, poor souls, instead of, as they ought, firmly insisting on his removal, not only suffer in silence, but are rendered, many of them, overwhelmingly 'hot with shame' on his account.

In this instance, Phillis regarded the offending Stubbs in exactly the same light as though he had laughed aloud in Church—during the service.

Of course she had often heard his laugh before, but never had it seemed to strike such a false, such a jarring note.

"I must go in," she said, turning away. "Mrs Cumberledge will be wondering where I am."

But she did not escape so easily from her assiduous admirer.

Whenever Captain Horatio Stubbs—commonly called 'Orry in the privacy of his family circle—wanted something in this world, that something he generally managed to obtain. Push, determination, energy,—all these qualities were his; and in addition, he had an inestimable advantage over most people in the possession of not only an impenetrable hide, but also—a large fortune.

He had been immensely attracted by Phillis's fresh young beauty, her bright hair, and her general bearing. 'Distangay' he called it, when describing her to his mother, who, however, was by no means willing that he should throw himself away upon a mere nobody like this Miss Montague, who was not even an Honourable! That would indeed be a 'miscellaneous' for her 'Orry. With his money she hoped he would pick up an Earl's daughter at the very least. She pictured to herself some stately Lady Patricia, or Lady Augusta,

coming home on the arm of her 'Glorious son of Mars,' as he had once—in the local paper—been described with what she looked upon as well-meant, though perhaps rather too familiar and intimate, reference to herself!

Poor old Mrs Stubbs, it almost broke her heart that she was only *Mrs* Stubbs still, and not 'my lady.' Stubbs would have been a Birthday Knight 'to a moral,' if he had lived, she used to say. And now she would have to remain a 'commoner' for the rest of her life, unless some nobleman or other—apparently it didn't matter much which of them—took a fancy to her, and raised her to the Peerage!

With the unromantic figure of Captain Stubbs strutting beside her, Phillis made her way down the pathway between the lines of neat white tents that had sprung up so rapidly, turning this lonely portion of the jungle into a populous little city of canvas that fluttered and shone white under the smiling moon.

"Let's fix up 'bout the elephant hunt, Miss Montague," he said eagerly, his speech even more staccato than usual. "Let's go together—same elephant, I mean, you know, Miss Montague."

Why on earth, she wondered, did he always find it necessary to call her by her name? "Those sort of people always do," replied her inner consciousness. But she stifled the thought as soon as it was born, refusing to think unkindly of one who was so kind.

"Both on the same elephant," he went on. "I'll square it with the Rajah. Decent chap the Rajah—black as your boot, of course. . . ."

"Oh, hush, hush," interrupted Phillis. "You might hurt their feelings. They all understand English."

"Well, it's quite true, isn't it? Where's the harm? If I was black. . . ."

"Really, Captain Stubbs," she broke in icily, "I think we had better postpone this discussion till the morning, when everything is not so still and quiet, and your voice doesn't carry quite so far."

"My voice—what's that about my voice?" echoed Stubbs, who had not reached the age of thirty without becoming aware that it was not his most unassailable point. "Too loud is it? I'll . . . I'll talk as soft as you like then. I'll do anythin' . . . anythin' in the world to please *you*."

"I must go in now," said Phillis hurriedly. "Good night; we will decide about the elephant in the morning. Good night."

"Miss Montague. I say. . . ."

But she was gone. And Stubbs, extracting a very expensive cigar from his very expensive case, walked slowly away to his own tent, at the door of which he stood for a long while, ruminating—an uncouth, solitary figure in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The woven leaves
Make network of the dark blue light of day."

NEXT day, to Phillis's intense disappointment, they did not go out elephant-hunting after all.

The hunters who were busy in the forest in large numbers searching for the wild elephants had sent in no 'khubber'—which word, as all well-informed people knew, she was told, meant 'news.'

And since it was no good going out on the 'off' chance of finding an elephant, they just had to wait.

After breakfast some of the men went out in the hope of getting a shot at a deer or a leopard, and the remainder of the party whiled away the time as best they could, buoyed up by the hope that news would soon be brought in.

In the afternoon they were all taken down to the Elephant Lines in order that they might see something of the domestic life of the huge beasts. Phillis's enthusiastic young friend in the Forest Department took charge of her and regaled her still further with erudite information as to the political economy of the elephant.

"An elephant," he said authoritatively, "never forgives an injury. You see that big fellow over there," and he pointed as he spoke to a very tall, grimy-looking elephant that was fastened by means of stout chains

round its fore-legs to trees, and was evidently in disgrace. "Well, one of the attendants is supposed recently to have swindled him out of his daily 'tot of rum.' All the Maharajah's 'fighting' elephants, you know, get a regular ration of native liquor, something after the nature of rum, and are very fond of it. So the day before yesterday, when this native came unsuspectingly down to the lines, there was a 'hurroosh,' and the big elephant made a rush for him. Unfortunately, in its charge, it put its foot by mistake on another native who was innocently cutting grass in the neighbourhood, and killed him outright, whilst the real culprit escaped."

"Oh, what a dreadful thing," said Phillis. "I thought they were all so tame and amenable."

"So they are, but they won't stand being done in the eye. You see those great big flat cakes lying over there; well, each elephant gets one of those, in addition to lots of grass, and branches, and other stuff, as his daily allowance. Now, if you give an elephant short weight, if his cake isn't as big as it ought to be, do you think he'll take it? Not a bit of it. He will weigh it carefully in his trunk, and chuck it back to you."

"Haw, haw. I should jolly well like to see him do *that*," roared Stubbs, rending the air with his laugh.

"Well, you *can*, any time," said the youth indignantly, furious that his word should be doubted. "Do you think I made it up? Do you think I've been stuffing Miss Montague? . . ."

"No, of course not," broke in Phillis. "Captain Stubbs didn't mean that for a moment—now, did you?" she asked appealingly.

"I should jolly well like to see it all the same," said the obstinate Stubbs, to her very evident annoyance.

Why on earth can't he behave like a gentleman? I

am positively ashamed of him, she thought, as the boy, muttering something about swaggering bounders, hurried her on to where the rest of the elephants, picketed in two long lines, were contentedly munching away at the yellow grass, bundles of which were stacked in front of them.

Phillis was particularly interested in one of the elephants which was looking after a naked native infant, a merry ball of shining blackness.

This monstrous, solemn nurse, the embodiment of grave responsibility, appeared to be taking no notice whatever, until the child had crawled almost beyond its reach, when out would shoot the quick, snake-like, prehensile trunk, and gently lifting the little body, would deposit it with the greatest care once more in safety.

The mahout told them that this elephant had looked after him and his brother in just the same way when they were babies, and that when this small, black doll grew up he would doubtless be a mahout too, and drive the old elephant as his father and grandfather had done before him. Further on they laughed heartily at what was a truly ridiculous sight—a little native boy about six years of age, innocent of every vestige of clothing, belabouring a stout, light-coloured elephant on the toenails with a tent-peg.

The huge beast was raising its feet one after the other from the ground, crying out with pain, loudly lamenting its fate, whilst the little demon—whom it could have crushed out of existence almost without noticing that it had done so—punished and bullied it to his heart's content.

Just then the sharp note of a bugle rang out in the still air.

"That means feeding-time, Miss Montague. Now you'll be able to see for yourself," said the Forest Officer, with a glance to where the rotund, gaily-coloured figure of Stubbs was strutting, like some plump bird of Paradise, behind them. "If you give them short weight they just chuck it back."

He seemed to be so sure of the truth of his statement that Phillis felt convinced there must be something in it, in spite of the fact that neither of the elephants on whom they tried the experiment of breaking off and withholding a piece of the great flat cake, made the slightest demur, but just took what was given them, and were thankful.

"I have seen them refuse it over and over again," he protested vehemently, mortified beyond measure when the hated laugh of that 'swaggering bounder' proclaimed the fact that he had been a witness of their ill-success.

"They are just like children who won't show off when you want them to," said Phillis soothingly. "I'll come and see them with you another day, when there aren't so many people. The sight of such a crowd of strangers probably upsets them."

But he was not to be comforted, and kept reiterating all the way back to camp that he had never before seen any elephants who would let themselves be imposed upon like that. At the same time he maintained a continuous fire of indistinct but ferocious threats, which she thought it best not to overhear, as to what he would do with that 'bounder of a heavy dragoon,' when he got the chance.

It was with mixed feelings that Phillis discovered on the morrow that Captain Stubbs had 'squared it,' as

he had said he would, with the Maharajah, and that she was to spend the whole of a long day in the jungle as his companion, sharing with him the by no means extensive accommodation afforded by the back of a 'pad' elephant.

In the grey, misty dawn, some thirty of the most sedate and trustworthy of the elephants, to which had been assigned the task of carrying the spectators, were brought round to camp.

On the back of each, fastened with thick ropes, was a pad made of rough sacking stuffed with wool; and on this, with the help of the ropes which were knotted in frequent, convenient loops, the riders had to balance themselves as best they might.

On the neck of each elephant sat its mahout or driver, whose legs were entirely hidden from sight under the droll, gigantic ears; and whose right hand held the sharp, cruel-looking goad with which he guided and controlled his docile monster.

Phillis, with her attendant cavalier—whose costume was the very latest thing in ultra-sporting attire—stood watching the others as they climbed, after almost superhuman exertions in some cases, to their exalted seats.

Dear old Mrs Cumberledge, whose stout, imposing figure was more suited to gentle carriage exercise than to performing gymnastic feats on the swaying back of what she called—without exactly knowing the meaning of the word—a 'Leviathan,' had the very greatest difficulty in mounting. Indeed it was only by the help of four stalwart men who pushed and pulled her into position, that she ever got up at all.

Stubbs, who showed signs of waxing facetious at the sight of the good lady's struggles, was speedily suppressed

by his companion, who—looking deliciously cool and fresh, and somehow strangely aloof, in the cold light of the early morning, her beautiful eyes very clear, and her slim figure very straight—made him feel, under her calm scrutiny, almost . . . hang it! . . . for the moment, almost uncomfortable.

Soon it was their turn; and the elephant they were to ride, whose name the mahout informed them was Lord Roberts, came swaying forward with measured tread, and knelt at their feet.

Stubbs climbed on to the pad first, and leaning over, gave her his hand—a thick, short, eminently plebeian hand, covered with reddish hair—to assist her in mounting. Grasping it firmly in her long, slim fingers—though not without a little involuntary shudder—and placing one foot in a noose of the rope that hung down from the pad, she scrambled up beside him.

“Hold tight!” some one cried; and then a violent upheaval—what appeared to Phillis to be, at the very least, an earthquake—took place. The animated mountain on which they were seated suddenly raised the front portion of itself higher . . . and higher . . . and higher . . . until she thought she must inevitably slip down the steeply-inclined plane—over its little wriggly tail—to destruction!

She clung desperately to the ropes.

Then quite suddenly the mountain righted itself, and she found herself perched high on the mighty swaying back, moving forward in the long string of elephants that wound down the narrow jungle-path towards the river.

She soon got accustomed to the motion, and settled herself fairly comfortably, taking care, all the time, to

keep one hand on the thick knotted rope that fastened to the elephant's back the pad on which they were sitting.

From her exalted position she could see away over the high yellow grass,—the feathery heads of which seemed to wave them farewell as they passed—to where the thick jungle, composed of mighty trees and dense undergrowth impenetrable to man, except on elephants, covering hills and valleys in a dark shroud, loomed threateningly, yet, at the same time, strangely invitingly in the distance.

Soon they reached the bed of the river—a level sandy expanse, strewn with great boulders—stretching a wide mile from bank to bank ; a giant pathway, carved through countless ages by the swift water, deep in the rocky soil of the jungle.

This river—a tributary of the Ganges—in the Rains a foaming flood, churning its yellow way between banks vividly green, bearing on its troubled surface, trees and logs and tangled wreckage, spoils of a triumphant progress from its distant mountain source ; but now, flowing smoothly, peacefully along, a tenth only of its former size, its placid waters reflecting the green and grey of trees and rocks, and the cloudless blue monotony of the Indian sky.

Sandy wastes on either side stretched from the margin of the running water to where the green of luxuriant jungle vegetation sharply defined the edges of the river's bed.

Over the deep sand, which was pitted in a thousand places with the foot-prints of wild animals, past a bed of shingle, and two gigantic rocks, wound the procession.

On reaching the water's edge, the leading elephant, with grave deliberation, advanced a step or two into the stream, then stopped and trumpeted.

"He thinks it is too deep," said Phillis excitedly. Then, "Oh, what a shame!" as the mahout, who knew it was not too deep, struck him several hollow-sounding blows on the head with the flat of his steel goad, and ordered him to go forward.

"It don't hurt the old beggar much, I fancy," commented Stubbs. "Hard as iron that head of his. I remember seein' an elephant once who wouldn't work, or had done somethin' or other, havin' an awful time of it. His mahout made a regular jam-tart——"

"Oh, how abominable," cried Phillis, with a face of disgust, interrupting his tale. "Please don't tell me such things—such atrocious things, Captain Stubbs."

"Sorry," blurted out Stubbs. "Thought you would be interested—rather prided myself on the delicacy of the metaphor, too. Jam-tart. More refined than saying straight out. . . ."

"Oh, no more of it, if you please," said Phillis, with cold disdain. "Look, they are moving on now. I suppose they have persuaded that wise-looking old leader that it's not too deep after all. How carefully they move, these great beasts, so huge, yet not the least bit clumsy. You know, the highest compliment the Eastern poets can pay a woman is to say her walk is as graceful as that of an elephant. Doesn't it sound queer?"

"Yes. All the same, graceful or not, I shouldn't care to have one sitting on my knee."

"What nonsense," laughed Phillis, "an elephant—how ridiculous it would look."

Stubbs joined in her laughter, glad to think that she was once more friendly.

On board ship he had seen a great deal of his dainty companion. She had always seemed to like him, he thought. Times without number had she walked up and down the deck by his side—the incarnation of health and high-spirits. And he had grown to love the sight of her slim sweetness, her shining hair, her bright smile; to feel that life would not be worth living, however rich he might be, unless she would share it with him. Trite, time-honoured sentiments enough, simmering in an elementary, vulgar brain, but, for all that, just as true and real and compelling as though they sprung from a nobler heart, a more cultured mind, a more commanding intellect.

By this time, still following their leader, the line stretched right across the river, spanning it, as it were, with a bridge of moving piers, which were composed of wading elephants that forded the stream with solemn and absorbed attention, the water washing against their sides, and breaking into foaming eddies in their wake.

On the farther side was a long stretch of flat, fairly open country, where no trees grew, only the elephant-grass, lofty and sere, its myriad spear-shaped, downy heads gracefully waving in the light breeze.

Beyond this, on rising ground, was a broad belt of dense jungle—a favourite haunt of wild elephants.

The scene was indescribably lovely, Phillis thought. Innumerable shades of green and gold on trees and grasses, and in the distance, the purple glamour of the hills.

At the edge of the forest, in the shelter of a steep wooded bluff, where a narrow valley opened out on

to the plain, the elephants that carried the spectators were drawn up in line.

Near at hand were some of the fifty 'fighting' elephants, as they were called, belonging to the Maharajah — 'The Pack.'

On each of these were two natives—the mahout, of course, to drive the animal, and a hunter carrying a thick rope and a spiked club with which to assist his companion in getting the 'last ounce' out of their mount in the race after the wild elephant.

They were posted in small groups at various points of vantage on the outskirts of the jungle, and kept moving to and fro, in and out of the wood—appearing suddenly from unexpected quarters, and frightening some of the inexperienced visitors into fits.

Far off the clamour of the 'beaters,' who were also mounted on elephants, was already faintly audible; there was constant firing of shot-guns, shouting, rattling, hammering on trees, and beating of 'tom-toms.'

Presently a report was circulated that a fine tusker had been marked down, and that an attempt was now being made to drive him down the valley past the spot where they were assembled.

Excitement ran high, conversation was carried on in whispers only, lest the wild elephant, still miles away in the jungle, should hear and be afraid.

"One of the peculiarities of the elephant," Phillis's friend the Forest Officer had told her in one of his didactic harangues, "is that, except when he is asleep, he is never still. There is always some portion of his vast form in motion. Either he is pulling up grass by the roots with his trunk, and knocking out the earth from it against one of his feet, preparatory to

eating it, or he is tearing down branches from the trees, whisking the flies away with his tail, flapping his great ears, swaying his great body—in short, repose is foreign to his nature, and his life one long protracted meal.”

So that when, as occurred every now and again, the pad-elephants—which had been drawn up in line some five or six yards apart, and covered consequently a space of nearly two hundred yards—suddenly at the same instant, as though acting on some preconcerted signal, all ceased their flapping and whisking and knocking and shaking, and stood for nearly a minute absolutely motionless, as though they had been turned to stone, the sudden stillness—the absence of all the sounds to which the ears of the spectators had become accustomed, the almost breathless silence, undisturbed by even the slightest rustle—was positively awe-inspiring.

“They’re listening for the wild one!” whispered Phillis, thrilling with excitement.

Then simultaneously as before, seemingly on another soundless word of command, all the familiar noises recommenced; each elephant, released from the necessity for strict ‘attention,’ relaxed, ‘stood easy,’ and continued his interrupted meal.

“Isn’t it,” asked Stubbs, “just exactly as if the head elephant had said, ‘Shut up for a minute, you fellas, will you, and listen’?”

“Oh, it’s wonderful, wonderful!” replied Phillis, looking down the line of curling trunks and restless moving shapes. “How on earth the one at the far end there can possibly communicate with our elephant

at this end of the line, so that they both stop and listen at the very same second—that's the extraordinary part. . . ."

She broke off, absorbed in contemplation of this mystery.

"Yes, rum go," replied Stubbs. "Quite beats me."

"Telepathy of some sort, I suppose," she went on.

"Telegraphy?" he questioned, not in the least understanding.

"Well, a first cousin, perhaps, to *wireless* telegraphy. If a message can be sent by waves of electricity, why not a thought? Only we would have to know how to send it, of course, and how to attune the mind of some one at the other end to receive it. . . ."

Stubbs was bewildered.

"Tune the mind!" he repeated; then brightening up, went on, "I know rather a funny story about a tuner—a piano-tuner, you know. . . ."

But she took no notice of him, still musing on the elephants.

"I am sure they must be able to communicate with one another somehow," she meditated, speaking her thoughts aloud. "They are so wise, so sensible. They seem *literally* to understand every word their mahouts say to them in that uncanny 'elephant language' of theirs. I suppose there is no doubt there must be quantities of sounds that are beyond our powers of hearing, just as there are sights beyond our vision. . . . Those wonderful ultra-violet rays, for instance, that they say will go right through a brick wall and out the other side, and the infra-red rays of heat that dogs see though we can't."

Stubbs, upon whom this learned disquisition was completely thrown away, began to fear that she must have a touch of the sun.

He was confident that in her sober senses she would never be guilty of talking what he would unhesitatingly have called—had she not been his adored ideal of all the female virtues—‘such awful rot!’

CHAPTER XIV.

“To the portals of the sunset,
To the earth's remotest border.”

THE Maharajah's guests had a long, rather wearisome wait at the edge of the forest, whilst the beaters, for fully two hours, worked through the dense undergrowth which was so thick and heavy in many places that it was altogether impassable.

During this time, stout Mrs Cumberledge, fatigued by the novel method of travelling, the long journey, and the heat, took the opportunity of going fast asleep on her elephant.

Waking up suddenly, some little time later, she caught sight of Phillis smiling at her from Lord Roberts's back, about ten elephant's lengths away, and—quite oblivious of the gravity of the situation, of the tense excitement that prevailed around her, forgetting indeed for the moment the very nature of the game of which they were in pursuit—called out in her loud, cheerful voice—

“Phil—lis! I don't believe this old tiger's coming at all!”

Consternation reigned. Faces, both black and white, indicative of surprise, alarm, anger, were turned towards her. Furious faces! Once only before in the

whole course of her blameless life had she been the object of such hostile, such vindictive glances.

Years before, at a concert—music with her always acted as a soporific—she had wakened suddenly in just the same manner, and had made an innocent remark to her husband in just the same loud, cheerful voice, in the very middle, it appeared, of some transcendently beautiful performance. Every one in the house, it seemed to her, had turned round to glare; a very nightmare! Men and women of ferocious aspect, each of them making, for her edification, a curious, sibilant, threatening, almost venomous noise—a noise that is indescribable, that is by no means even faintly indicated by the feebly ineffectual, the pitifully inadequate, though at the same time the only available word, ‘Hush!’

Poor Mrs Cumberledge, it was hard that she should fall a victim a second time to such ill-treatment.

She realised almost at once the heinousness of her crime, and devoutly wished the earth would open and swallow her up—elephant and all.

Meanwhile Phillis was convulsed with merriment. The contrast that Mrs Cumberledge, with her casual reference to ‘this old tiger,’ presented to the rest of the assemblage—to the keen, hard-bitten hunters and mahouts; to the excited spectators; to the elephants themselves, even, who, one and all, displayed the very liveliest interest in the proceedings—struck her as intensely humorous.

Just then the line of elephants froze once again into immobility.

Once again a deathlike silence reigned. This was broken by a distant, crashing sound in the jungle. It

grew rapidly louder and louder; and now they could distinctly hear, close at hand, the shouts of the hunters, and farther off the cries and shots, and the unceasing rattle of the beaters.

Nearer came the sounds. Louder grew the Babel. Pad-elephants, mahouts, spectators,—all were listening with bated breath, at fever-heat, expecting every moment the tusker to appear.

Phillis grasped the knotted rope of the pad firmly with both her hands, in readiness for whatever might befall. And Stubbs, emboldened by the proximity of their dangerous quarry, stretched out an arm over her to protect her from possible perils.

Three minutes followed of almost unbearable suspense.

Then, with a mighty swaying and crashing of bent trees and trampled undergrowth, the green curtain of the forest was rudely torn asunder, and a fine male elephant—his sharp curved ivory tusks gleaming in the sunlight—broke covert.

With trunk outstretched, ready to hurl aside every obstacle that might impede his progress, with great limbs strained to their utmost in wildest panic, he surged into the open, and sped with gliding, noiseless swiftness over the narrow strip of grass-land near the bluff—his vast bulk seeming to drift amidst the shadows of the jungle like some black thunder-cloud driven before the storm.

Close behind him, pressing him hard, came the 'pack'; the mahouts making savage play with their blood-stained goads, and shouting vociferously at one another, at the wild tusker, and at their own unwieldy mounts—showering praises on the fast, male-dictions on the slow.

The hunters, who now on reaching the more open country, managed by means of ropes to maintain an almost upright position on their elephants, joined in the tumult, giving vent every now and then to what appeared to be the native equivalent to a 'View Holloa'—only more so—and unmercifully belabouring the hind-quarters of their elephants with the formidable spiked clubs with which they were armed.

It was a scene of the wildest confusion; monstrous shapes dashed hither and thither in the jungle; frenzied cries resounded on every side.

Lord Roberts's mahout, in whose charge, and entirely at whose mercy, were Phillis and her companion, was wild with excitement. He completely forgot, or disregarded, the stringent orders of the Maharajah that none of the spectators' elephants were, on any account, actually to join in the chase—since at the last Keddah an accident had occurred, and a lady been killed—but were to come along soberly in rear; in sight, but out of danger; and with shrill cries of delight, weird crows of exultation, pushed forward right among the leaders of the 'pack.'

This position they maintained almost throughout the entire run, partly owing to sheer good fortune, and partly owing to the fact that Lord Roberts—although not in hard training like the 'fighting elephants'—was still an uncommonly good goer, and, under the red torture of the dripping goad, fairly made the landscape fly past their dazzled eyes.

Twice, when in spite of every effort they were dropping behind, and the broad, ungainly backs of the 'pack' were disappearing in the long grass, far ahead the hunt swerved a full half-circle to the left, enabling

them to 'cut in' and get on terms once more with the best.

As they dashed through brier and brake, it was all Phillis could do to hold on. She crouched low on the rough pad, convulsively grasping the thick rope with both her hands. Countless sprays of yellow elephant-grass brushed against her cheeks, filling her hair and eyes with warm, soft down. Long tendrils of the clinging forest-creepers stretched out restraining arms, grasping her dress. Cataracts of leaves and branches swept over her bowed head, making her cling the closer.

And Stubbs—thick, burly Stubbs, her sturdy buckler of defence against these very present dangers—was ever watchful and devoted, interposing his own solid body to protect her from the rough usage of the leaves and grasses, the seductions of the creepers, and the graver peril of the boughs.

On, on they went. Never before had Phillis felt so warm a liking for him; never before had his strength, his self-reliance—which at one time she had been wont to call his self-sufficiency—seemed so attractive to her, so restful. How free from all cares and anxieties, all heart-burnings and worries, did a future, protected by those strong arms of his, appear.

Protected, looked after, cared for, this she felt sure, was the secret of lasting happiness. To have some one—always kind, always good, always devoted, as she knew him to be—to care for her; to give her a beautiful home,—involuntarily she thought of the stately old Priory, photographs of which he had shown her—to come between her and all trouble, to shield her always from the sorrows and disappointments of

life, just as now he was protecting her from the blows and buffets of the forest.

By this time they had left the comparatively open jungle—where the occasional trees could usually be altogether avoided, and the elephant-grass was no obstacle to their progress—and had plunged into a dense and gloomy belt of the forest.

Here their mahout happened, luckily, to strike a path. Otherwise it would have been impossible for them to go forward at all, since, in the thick jungle on either side—through which the ‘fighting’ elephants were painfully forcing their way—Phillis and her companion must inevitably have been swept off Lord Roberts’s back.

As it was, they kept their proud position in the van. Indeed, at one time, profiting by the comparatively good going afforded by the path, they led the whole field; and for a few minutes, were separated by only about fifty yards from the wild tusker, who, almost worn out by his unwonted exertions, was now clearly visible through the graceful feathery foliage of the bamboo trees, of which just there the jungle was composed.

At first, when abandoning the friendly sunshine, they had dived suddenly into the mysterious, unexplored depths of the jungle where, ‘in the dim, green, dayless day,’ all sorts of hitherto unimagined terrors seemed to threaten her, Phillis had been afraid—desperately afraid.

“Make him stop; oh, make him stop!” she cried.

But the mahout, who understood no tongue known to either of them, only thought that Stubbs’s shouts of ‘stop’ were meant to urge him forward, and redoubled his endeavours to goad Lord Roberts on.

Turning half round to the trembling girl, Stubbs took her hand, and held it in his strong grasp. She made no attempt to release it, but rather clung convulsively, as might a drowning man cling to the hand of a rescuer.

In a few minutes—helped, no doubt, not a little by the warm encouragement of his friendly grip—she felt better; her spasm of terror passed away.

"She never let me hold her hand before," thought Stubbs, radiant. "I believe she's fond of me after all. Darling little Phillis," and he squeezed her hand more tightly still.

Now that she was feeling reassured again—owing to the fact that possibly she had absorbed, through contact with him, some of his exuberant vitality—her chief anxiety was, without hurting his feelings, or seeming ungrateful to him, to free her hand.

Not only was she suffering acutely from the vehemence of his grasp, but the situation was becoming embarrassing, not to say ridiculous.

In this thick forest there was plenty of work for both his hands, and at last, when one long trailing branch very nearly tore her hat off, she timidly ventured to tell him so.

And now, just ahead of them, with constant crashings like the roar of the sea, making the jungle swirl and eddy, wave on green hurtling wave, the black monster forced his rending, shattering way.

On both sides of them, breasting the billows of foliage, trampling, tearing, ploughing through the forest, forging ahead of poor Lord Roberts, who, by now, had shot his bolt, came the 'fighting' elephants, hot on the trail.

"We shan't be in at the 'death' after all, little girl," cried Stubbs, beside himself with excitement, anxiety, and love. "Oh, Miss Montague. . . . Phillis . . . I *may* call you Miss Montague, mayn't I? . . ."

At this, Phillis, keyed up as she was to the highest pitch of excitement, could not, in spite of the evident passion in his tone, restrain a half-hysterical laugh.

"I certainly don't want you to call me anything else," she managed to articulate. "But never mind that. Look, look!"

They had reached the edge of the jungle, and before them was an open, undulating plain, dotted here and there with scrub.

The 'pack,' which a moment before had been streaming across this plain, appeared to spread out fan-wise, then, as they watched, to form a circle round a central figure that stood, a pitiable object, with dripping trunk lashing its sides, tottering and staggering to and fro—a mountain of distress.

"One last effort, dear Lord Roberts—just one little struggle more," cried Phillis, reaching down and patting his unresponsive hide as he laboured heavily over the dry crackling grass.

Then, from a slight eminence—which that adorable Lord Roberts had just the strength to climb—they could look down at their leisure on the strange scene that was being enacted below.

The 'pack,' all mighty warriors—their huge tusks blunted and bound with broad bands of brass—stood in a complete circle round the quarry, head touching monstrous nodding head, cheek to ponderous leathern jowl, brandishing triumphant trunks.

Phillis could not help feeling sorry for the poor

wild elephant, standing there surrounded by this wall of stony, impassive, mask-like faces—faces as utterly devoid of all expression as those of parrots or Chinamen—he looked so helpless and forlorn, poor beast.

Gradually the circle grew smaller; they were closing in on their prey. Little by little the circumference diminished until there was a double row of elephants—a broad, impenetrable ring—around the captive. When this manœuvre had been completed, one of the hunters, standing upright on his elephant—a burnished, bronze figure against the sun—swung for a moment, round and round, high in the air above him, a noose of stout rope—a veritable ship's cable in thickness—and sent it hurtling lasso-wise over the wild tusker's head.

Instantly, up went the trunk of the tormented beast, to discover what new enemy, what writhing snake from heaven this might be, and down slid the rope over the frayed, flapping ears, and settled round his corrugated neck.

A second rope, thrown with less skill, was caught by the writhing, flexible trunk, and thrown back—and a third. But soon there were four stout cables in position, firmly fixed, worthy shackles for the fettering of the greatest of all living animals.

After this had been successfully accomplished, there appeared to be a slight lull in the proceedings; and Stubbs, turning to the Maharajah, whose elephant had joined them on their hill, asked what they were going to do next.

“Rope the hind-legs,” replied His Highness, in his curiously clipped and accented English, as two

men carrying ropes approached the captive stealthily from behind.

"By Jove, isn't that rather dangerous?" asked Stubbs.

"They will die," was the princely answer, accompanied by a shrug of indifference.

That such a trifling matter as a death or two could be of the slightest importance to his guests, was evidently quite beyond the Maharajah's callous comprehension.

But they did *not* die. Each of them, after throwing the end of his rope round one of the hind-legs and deftly catching it again, got safely away.

Phillis gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank heaven!" she whispered to Stubbs. "Those poor men. . . . That horrible Rajah!"

And now everything was ready for the journey to camp,—'The leading him home like a little dog with a string round his neck!'

Three of the 'fighting,' elephants were harnessed to each of the four head-ropes, a couple to each of the heel-ropes, and the two biggest of all took their stand immediately in rear of the prisoner. Then the order was given to march.

At first the captive resolutely refused to 'march.' He flung himself down on the ground, trumpeted, snorted, fought, and struggled.

Never before in his jungle home had he met with any strength that equalled his own. Such a thing as resistance to his might, to his sovereign will, was unknown to him—incomprehensible.

But now he found himself at the mercy of a force that was incomparably greater than his,—the combined strength of sixteen elephants all pulling at the same moment,—irresistible.

Slowly, unwillingly, fighting, and resisting, every step of the way, he was forced to obey his implacable captors. When he would not walk he was dragged, and in addition had to submit to the unwelcome attentions of the two giants in rear, who, with great brass-bound tusks, prodded him severely, and cruelly urged him on.

"How mean of the tame elephants," cried Phillis, "to side with us humans against their own kith and kin."

"Don't they enjoy it too?" laughed Stubbs. "Look at that big fella, did you ever see such a frightful 'bunt' as he's just given the wild chap with his head?"

"It is all like a dream," said Phillis. "I have pinched myself a dozen times in order to wake up but I can't. It doesn't seem possible that it can be a real *wild* elephant we are leading home so quietly." For now the prisoner, seeing the uselessness of further resistance, had for the time being given in, and with an air of deepest dejection was obediently following his leaders. "Look at him," she went on, "pacing along so soberly, surrounded by his escort, just as though the idea of running away and being wild again had never once entered his head."

"Rum beggar," was her companion's intellectual comment.

At the best of times Stubbs was not gifted with striking conversational powers; and just now, preoccupied with his intense desire to win Phillis, and at the same time feeling terribly afraid that he 'would be sure to go and make a mess of it,' he was dulness personified.

She experienced that strange feeling of constraint—of physical discomfort, almost—that so often presages a storm; a storm of the passions as well as of the elements. She more than half suspected what it was he

had in his mind to say to her, and not wishing to be called upon to make any decision just yet, chatted on incessantly in self-defence.

"Have we really been flying through the forests all day long, I wonder, or have I been asleep? Do you remember in that dark valley how we came quite close up to the wild elephant? He was exactly like the Jabberwock as he came 'whiffing through the tulgy wood.' . . ."

"Phillis . . ."

"Do you remember how . . ."

"Phillis . . ."

"Captain Stubbs, I don't think . . ."

"Phillis, will you marry me?" After this burst of eloquence, seeing, as he thought, that she was going to refuse, he went on excitedly, "Don't answer yet. Don't answer yet. Think it over. I won't hurry you. . . . Your guv'nor would like it. . . . I told him . . . I . . . I swear I would be a jolly good husband to you. And . . . and the money's all right, you know. You can have anything you like, in reason. And I . . . I, Phillis, I love you . . . I love you . . . I love you like the devil!"

Even at so critical, so serious a moment, Phillis could not restrain a smile at the uncouthness of his wooing.

"My father," she repeated, "what did he say?"

"Say? Why, he said, 'go in and win.'"

"But, Captain Stubbs, I'm afraid I don't care for——"

"Of course you don't care for me," he broke in. "How should you? I'm a rough chap—no good with women. You're the only girl I . . . I . . . the only girl for me."

"Oh, I'm sorry," began Phillis.

"Don't be sorry. Done good, not harm. Think it over. Your guv'nor would be pleased. Tell me to-morrow."

"Oh, but . . ."

"No! No! Tell me to-morrow. Oughtn't to have asked you—stuck up here alone with me. No escape. Couldn't help it though—Sorry. Now we'll change the subject, shall we?" And he went on in his heaviest 'heavy dragoon' manner, "Awfully jolly star comin' up over there by that tree. Do you see him? Must be a planet, I should think."

"Oh, that's Sirius," answered Phillis meekly, thankful for the respite, and feeling grateful to him for the delicacy he displayed in handling so difficult a situation. "Even if he *is* rough and queer," she reflected, "I am quite sure he has the best heart in the world." "Look, look how beautiful that is," she cried, as, emerging from the woodland gloom, they saw below them the broad river—its waters flickering and glowing in the lurid light of the dying day. Beyond was spread the tawny curtain of the sunset, wrought with embroideries of flame and gold. Nearer, at their feet almost, moved the dark shadows of the elephants,—silhouetted intensely black,—clear-cut, with cameo-like distinctness, against the smooth surface of the golden stream.

The captive elephant, by this time apparently quite resigned to his fate, no longer made the faintest resistance but went like a 'lamb.'

"The 'pack' must have been telling him what good times they have in the Maharajah's service," said Stubbs. "It takes about a year to tame 'em, so that Forest Johnny told me. And if they're over thirty when they're caught they're no good. They fret all the time, you know. And starve 'emselves, you know. And die—what?"

"Poor things. How old is this one?"

"About five-and-twenty, they say," he jerked out. "Fine tusks. Nine feet high. Placid disposition. Good business for the Rajah. Money in it."

By this time Phillis, after her long and exciting day in the open air, was almost worn out with fatigue.

"O—oh," she said, vainly trying to suppress a yawn, "I wonder how much longer it will take getting home."

"By Jove, you're tired. Tired out, of course," exclaimed Stubbs, dismayed at her pale cheeks. "Here, I say, I can be of some use, I think. I'll hang on to that rope over there. Then you lean up against me, see?" offering a solid back. "That's right," as she leant against him, "that will do beautifully. Now shut your eyes and go to sleep."

How natural it seemed, she dreamily reflected, for her to be looked after by him in this fashion—to rest, as she was doing, on his strength—safe—protected—at peace—and she dozed away the remainder of the journey to camp.

CHAPTER XV.

"A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

DURING the month passed so pleasantly by Phillis in the jungle, events at Ghazipur had marched apace.

On the morning following the dance at the club, as Peter, heavy-eyed and dejected, was feverishly pacing up and down his room, mentally casting up again and yet again his lamentable accounts, which each time seemed to come to a more and more staggeringly unpayable sum-total on the debit side, he was surprised by the entrance of his very special pet aversion, the Snake.

Captain Seton, looking for once in his shifty life as though he really had something honestly agreeable to say, proceeded with much solemnity and importance, as befitted the occasion, to inform him that he had been ordered by the Colonel to place him under arrest for assaulting Captain Grant at the club the night before.

Having exploded this bomb-shell, he paused—an expectant smile on his sinister face—to watch and enjoy its effect.

Peter could scarcely believe his ears.

He had never thought for an instant that Grant would dare to go so far as to report him officially.

The blighter! Of course he had knocked him down. He would do it again if necessary. Under the circumstances, considering that the Amorous Ape had deliberately provoked him . . . had said quite intolerable things, and behaved altogether abominably . . . there had seemed literally nothing else for him to do except to administer some sort of bodily chastisement.

Surely any one with a spark of decency would have done the same! And now the cur had actually had the effrontery to go whining to the Colonel. It was scandalous . . . unheard of!

What a fool the chap was, too. Surely it was to his own advantage to hush the whole thing up. There were no witnesses . . . unless Platt had overheard something . . . in which case it was all the more certain that Master Grant would come out of it precious badly!

And yet . . . here was Snake, woodenly telling him in his most official and important and obnoxious manner, that he had been sent to inform him that the Commanding Officer would investigate the case next day, and that meanwhile he was to hand over his sword.

This last order brought him furious to his feet.

"My sword!" he cried. "What do you mean? Is it a joke?"

"Not much of a joke for you, I should think, Dare," said Snake with a faint snigger.

He was not sorry . . . not by any means! . . . to see 'young Dare' taken down a peg or two. . . . It would do him all the good in the world. . . . The young devil had always been inclined to give himself airs about his riding . . . and his polo . . . and

all his other beastly games. As if that sort of thing counted . . . really!

Although he would have been the last person in the world to acknowledge it, Captain Seton was anything but a flier at games. His polo and cricket were of the feeblest order imaginable, and his lawn tennis had once been described by Denison as resembling that of an elderly governess!

Despite his notorious lack of skill in all kinds of field sports, he nevertheless took it upon himself—no one quite knew why—to feel the bitterest resentment towards, and jealousy of, any of his brother officers, especially if they had the misfortune to be junior to him, who happened to be less unskilful than himself.

It was perfectly ridiculous, he used always to say, that Dare should be Captain of the polo team, with power to say who should play for the regiment and who should not.

For want of a better man, Seton himself had been selected to play in the polo tournament of the previous year, on which occasion the Westshires had been ignominiously knocked out in the first round, and after the game, Peter had so far forgotten himself as to tell him that he had made a perfect ass of himself . . . that the whole performance had been absolutely pitiful . . . and that in future he had much better stick to marbles!

This candid expression of opinion had long rankled in his memory, and combined with other slights, real and imaginary, caused him to feel that the prospect of Dare's downfall was not altogether unbearable.

When Peter realised that his arrest was no laughing matter, he instantly made up his mind to show

no vestige of any kind of feeling for the gratification of the hostile Snake.

Without another word he handed over his sword, and going into the inner room, closed the door.

At this abrupt termination of what had promised to be a highly entertaining interview, Snake felt not a little sold. There were several questions he had meant to ask. Indeed, he had hoped by the exercise of a little judicious skill and sympathy, to succeed in worming out the whole story.

Baffled in this laudable ambition, he was obliged to content himself with the laborious and unremunerative task of pumping Platt.

For some little time Peter stood beside the open window in his bedroom looking out towards the stables that lay—a line of low thatched buildings—beneath the shadow of two great Peepul trees.

As he gazed abstractedly at the long row of loose-boxes—at the neat square patches of yellow straw, the ponies' bedding, spread out in the sun; at the picturesque, recumbent figures of the syces drowsing in the shade—the sound of the twelve o'clock gun, striking sharply through the hot, still air, suddenly stirred the peaceful scene to bustling activity. Simultaneously, each of the ponies, recognising the welcome signal for the midday meal, lifted up his voice and neighed. Syces ran hither and thither, whilst much clatter and talk and clanking of stable buckets ensued.

In the arched entrance of every stall appeared an eager, equine head, straining over the bars, clamouring for food.

In every stall was ardent, vivid, vigorous life—in every stall, save one. Lucifer's was empty.

Peter was just on the point of going across to see the ponies fed when it occurred to him that doubtless this would now be amongst the prohibited pleasures. Snake had taken care to explain to him that he was not allowed to leave the house whilst he was under arrest.

Not that it mattered very much, he thought, as of course he was sure to be released next day. The Colonel would be compelled to support him *this* time. Even *he* would recognise the absurdity of the charge, and agree that no one could possibly be expected to stand quietly by and listen whilst a lady of his acquaintance was being blackguarded. Of course it wouldn't be necessary to mention any names. Just a simple statement of what Grant had said was all that would be required. Perhaps it would be a lesson to the Amorous Ape . . . perhaps it would teach him not to play any more of his beastly West Indian tricks, now that he enjoyed the privilege of being an officer of the Westshire Regiment.

The incomprehensible part of it all was that he should ever have had the audacity to lodge an official complaint.

If ever a blow was justifiable, this one was. Of course it was unfortunate that they should both have been in uniform. . . . But there was nobody to see them, in the dark there, by the refreshment tent . . . nobody except Platt. It wasn't the least likely that any of the Band had been looking in that direction. . . . Why should they. . . . They were busy playing. . . .

The thought of the Band worried him, nevertheless.

Perhaps one of them *had* seen. . . . Of course it didn't do for officers to knock one another down in public, especially if there happened to be any of the

men about. He quite realised *that*. But the provocation, surely. . . . The Band had been some way off, too. He remembered passing them on his way to the ballroom, after he had knocked Grant down, and they were playing away like blazes. . . . Oh, no, none of them could have seen. . . . Besides, would it matter if they *had*?

He wished he could see Denison, but that was out of the question, as he had started off early that morning with Anstruther, with whom he was going as far as Bombay, and from there, on three months' leave, to Japan. No chance of getting hold of him now.

He felt rather deserted. They were the best friends he had in the regiment, these two, Denny and 'A,' and either of them would have seen him through. . . . Not that there was anything to be afraid of. It was perfectly absurd his being so jumpy!

All the same, he quite realised that he had enemies to deal with. There was Snake, who was an untrustworthy brute, Colonel 'Punch,' who had a down on him, and, of course, the Amorous Ape, who without doubt was thirsting for his blood.

The only real friend he had left was Platt. But Platt was a stupid old thing, and wouldn't be very much help in an emergency.

He devoutly wished Anstruther hadn't gone. He had been so awfully decent about everything; had even promised to go and see old Sir Peter about tidin' over the financial crisis—as he called it. And Denny too! Why the devil should they all abandon him like this?

As a matter of fact, Anstruther and Denison had gone away quite easy in their minds about Peter, both

feeling perfectly certain that his uncle—when he heard of the persistent bad luck that had pursued the boy—would come to the rescue.

Anstruther said he 'knew jolly well that the sportin' old buffer, when he heard that young Peter, besides being a good soldier, was a thorough sportsman, and thunderin' good all round into the bargain, would be quite sure to come up to the scratch and do the needful—although, apparently, he did find it rather hard to part.'

At the Enquiry, next day, Peter was treated from the very first by his Commanding Officer as though he were already a condemned criminal.

"A charge of scandalous conduct has been brought against you, Mr Dare," said that worthy, in his most pompous voice. Then, as Peter showed some slight signs of restiveness, he roared out, "Stand to attention, sir, and hold your tongue. I'll hear what you've got to say afterwards. Captain Seton," turning to his adjutant, "call in the witnesses."

At first Peter listened in sheer indignant amazement to the plausible tale that Grant reeled off so unhesitatingly—to the glib falsehoods that fell so convincingly from his lying lips.

Then a cold fear, a numbing apprehension, seemed little by little to freeze his heart. The whole story sounded so true, so circumstantial, so infernally probable. How was he to disprove it?

Captain Grant took good care to let it be understood, in the first place, that he was most unwilling to give evidence against a brother officer at all.

He was unfortunately obliged to admit, he said in his silkiest and most ingratiating accents, that he *had*

made a remark about Dare's racehorse on the night in question—a remark that had, perhaps, been . . . been ill-advised. Certainly, now, he very much regretted having made it. He had never deliberately intended to provoke Dare . . . certainly not. He was very much distressed at the whole affair. But he had felt compelled to report it, as he understood that some of the Band had seen the . . . er . . . assault take place . . . and heard the strong language Dare had made use of . . . and in the interests of discipline, since they were both in uniform, &c., &c.

At the conclusion of this astounding tissue of falsehoods, Peter again tried to speak, but was again prevented, and ordered to remain silent until all the evidence had been given.

The second witness was Platt.

With manifest reluctance, he made a rambling statement that he had been present and had seen the blow struck. He had heard Captain Grant say something about Dare's pony, Stella, not winning the race, and that she was a jade . . . she was too, which, in his opinion, made the remark all the more aggravating. He was quite sure Dare had not meant any harm. He thought the blow was . . . was an accident . . . more or less. An accident . . . under great provocation. Anybody might have done the same. No bad language had been used, as far as he knew.

Peter was astonished—utterly bewildered—dumb-founded. Literally, for a few moments, he could not believe his ears.

That Platt, of all people, should come out with a story like this! He had evidently been 'got at,' and the words put into his mouth. There was not the

slightest doubt of it. . . . But how? *That* was the mystery. Surely old Platt, honest as the day, would never dream of giving such evidence unless he was quite sure he was speaking the truth. How on earth had it been done? . . . It was certainly diabolically clever. Evidently this fellow Grant didn't stick at trifles.

With a sinking heart he told himself that he had been 'bested'—that the Amorous Ape had been too much for him.

Peter was certainly most unfortunate in being, at this crisis in his career, deprived of the staunch support of his friends.

Had his skipper or Major Anstruther been present, things might, probably would, have gone very differently. As it was, surrounded by enemies, the heart taken out of him by his continuous run of bad luck, sick and tired of everything, hopeless, depressed, forlorn, he was in no condition to make anything like a good fight of it.

Powerless to resist, he felt the net closing in on him—felt the uselessness of any struggle.

What on earth was the good, he asked himself gloomily, of dragging Phillis into it now.

Not that he had ever intended to mention her name, of course, but he had quite made up his mind to explain exactly what the circumstances were that had compelled him to knock Grant down, or to forfeit his own right to being any longer considered worthy of the name of officer and gentleman.

But this carefully concocted story of the Amorous Ape's put an entirely different complexion on the whole affair. . . . And now, with Platt gone so unaccountably over to the enemy, what hope was there

that the true version of what had occurred would ever be believed? Naturally, the Colonel, already prejudiced, would decide the case against him whatever he might say; would in all probability jeer at his explanation, scoff at his defence—and *that*, he felt, was more than he could stand. After all, it didn't matter much now what became of him. He was ruined anyway. Up to his eyes in debt; Phillis lost to him; all hope of success in his profession gone,—he was evidently destined to go under. What was the good of trying to fight the inevitable? Far better say nothing at all.

So when at length he was given an opportunity of denying the charge, of challenging the evidence, he remained silent.

Sullen and seemingly indifferent, on being asked what he had to say in his defence, he replied 'Nothing.'

In spite of all Punch's bluster, in spite of all his threats, he refused to speak.

Stubbornly he adhered to his decision that nothing they should say or do, would induce him to open his lips.

Consequently, after a few trenchant remarks by his Commanding Officer, the accused was remanded for trial by Court Martial, and ordered to return to his quarters under close arrest.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Tossed
Into the nothingness of scorn and noise
Into the living sea of waking dreams."

AFTER the stupendous exertions of the Keddah, it was necessary for the elephants to have a rest. Consequently, on the day following the capture of the wild tusker, the Maharajah's guests were left very much to their own devices. Some went out shooting; a small party rode off with one of the lesser Rajahs to witness some Hawking—a favourite pastime of the natives of the district—and the remainder, amongst whom were Phillis and Captain Stubbs, amused themselves by strolling about the camp and the neighbourhood.

In a secluded corner of the woods, surrounded by a crowd of interested natives, the little party came upon the wild elephant that had been captured the day before.

There in all the majesty of his giant height—firmly secured by great steel shackles and stout ropes—he stood towering above them, his curving tusks gleaming sharp and threatening, scimitar-like in the flickering light and shade.

He appeared to be quite resigned to his fate already, and was stolidly munching away at the grass, bundles of which were piled up near him.

"He evidently," said Phillis to her companion, "appreciates the convenience of having good food and plenty of it provided for him. Perhaps he won't miss his liberty very much after all."

"Miss it, indeed, I *don't* think," returned Stubbs, in the unintelligible jargon of modern gilded youth.

From the captive they went on to where, in a broad, shallow backwater of the Ganges, some of the other elephants were being given a bath by their swarthy attendants.

Such a sight it was! As the elephants lay on their sides, round and bulging in the water—which in their gambols they had churned up until it resembled pea-soup—their trunks up-curved, their great heads looking even more awkward and ungainly, more antediluvian, somehow, than when they stood upright, they presented a most ridiculous spectacle,—for all the world like one of Punch's prehistoric peeps!

The mahouts busily walked and crawled and scrambled about on the huge prostrate bodies—which, glistening with water, were not unlike the swelling, grey, mud-banks, wrinkled and ribbed, of the holy river Ganges—clambering fearlessly over the hills and dales of dusky hide, fold on great leathern fold, armour of proof, and scrubbing away assiduously with what appeared to Phillis to be nothing more or less than ordinary, hard, unfeeling, common-or-garden bricks!

"Bath-brick, no doubt," said Stubbs with the air of a discoverer. "Meanin' of the term has always been a mystery to me till now."

He was in great form that day, exuding facetiousness, and this made him even more trying than usual.

Phillis, after much anxious thought on the momentous

subject of marriage with him, had made up her mind to leave the ultimate determination of her fate to her parents. She would write and tell them of Captain Stubbs' proposal, and would say that if they really wished her to marry him, she would do so . . . that there was . . . that there was no one else . . . and that she thought he would make her a good husband. . . .

This decision she intended to make known to him when he should come to her demanding an answer.

It would, she knew, be at least five or six weeks before she could hear from home, and she felt that she must have time . . . a little time . . . before deciding irrevocably.

She would be nice to him, of course, and break it as gently as she could to him that he was not to have an answer just yet. . . . But she must not be hurried . . . she must think it over. She hoped he would understand.

Without doubt, the evil star of poor Captain Stubbs was in the ascendant when, on the party turning homewards, he seized the opportunity of more or less forcibly appropriating her, and of recounting for her edification, as he strutted jauntily along by her side, all the latest news.

"Bad business that at Ghazipur—what?" he said, in course of conversation.

"What business?" inquired Phillis absently.

"Haven't you heard about it? But of course you have—it's your own station."

"I've been out in the jungle with the Cumberledges, you know, for quite a long time. . . ."

"Why, that row in the Westshires, I mean," he explained.

"The Westshires? Why, what happened?" she asked, with sudden interest.

"Oh, nothing of any importance," he replied casually. "A subaltern knocked a captain down in public, and danced a war dance on his body, I believe."

"Who, who?" she cried, in a panic of premonition.

"Grant was the name of one of them," he answered, with aggravating deliberation. "The striker he was, I think . . . or," with a laugh—that appalling laugh of his—"or possibly the strikee. I don't remember exactly; any way, it's a disgraceful case. In public, you know, and all that. Looks as if there's a lot of bounders in these Line regiments, don't it?"

"Grant was the name, you say. Grant," repeated Phillis, from whose heart the sudden shadow of foreboding had been dispelled by his words. "I know him . . . Captain Grant. Tell me about it."

"Oh, Grant's a captain, is he? Well, in that case, he couldn't have been the striker." Then, with his insufferable laugh, he went on, "He must have been the strikee after all."

"Don't laugh like that," cried Phillis, white with apprehension, in a voice she scarcely recognised as her own. "Quick; who was the other?"

"Oh, one of the subalterns," he replied, staring at her in open-mouthed surprise. "I forget the name for the moment. . . . He used to race a bit in a small way, I remember. Dare . . . is there a Dare?"

At his words the whole scene reeled before her eyes; a confused medley of waving branches, heaving foliage, gnarled and knotted trunks of distorted trees, that seemed to dance a fantastic minuet, mocking her misery.

She clung to him for support.

"What is it?" he asked, his rough voice soft and almost tender. "Do you feel faint? Sit here a minute," leading her as he spoke to where a fallen giant of the forest lay solitary, moss-grown, forgotten it seemed, in those grim aisles; disowned rather, repudiated by all the other trees, its former companions, that flourished still alive, and looked towards it over a gulf—the gulf incomprehensible that separates living from dead.

The application to her lips of a gorgeous brandy flask—one of the numerous extravagant articles of equipment that formed Stubbs's elaborate jungle kit—brought some of the colour back to her cheeks.

"There," he said, delighted at the effect of the stimulant, "that'll soon put you right. Famous old brandy, this . . . cost. . . ."

"Tell me . . . tell me," she faltered, "about it—about him."

"What? About that fella Dare, and the row in the Westshires? Is that the trouble? Why, what . . . ?"

"We . . . we were brought up together," she explained.

"Oh, that's the chap, is it? I remember your telling me about him, now. It looks bad for him, I'm afraid. . . . He's pretty sure to be kicked out. . . ."

"Oh, no, no; it can't be true," she protested wildly. "Why, he's the bravest soldier in the whole world. They could never turn him out. Surely, surely, it can't be true."

"Well, perhaps not," he returned soothingly, alarmed at her distress. "I don't know much about it, anyhow. There was an account in one of the papers I got last night of the Court Martial. I'll send it. . . ."

"Court Martial!" she cried in anguish, leaping to her feet. "Quick, quick, let us go back; oh, let us go back at once!"

She seemed to be quite oblivious of his presence, talking wildly to herself, and hurrying, hurrying over the rough track that led to the camp. Puffing prodigiously, stout little Stubbs in his tight little boots, had considerable difficulty in keeping up with her as she sped along—her face frozen to a white mask of misery, eyes unseeing, hair blown wild, tremulous anxiety and eager effort in every lithe movement of her slim delicate limbs.

At first the blow had stunned her. Her mind seemed to be completely paralysed.

"Peter in trouble. . . . Peter a prisoner. . . . Tried by Court Martial!"

She kept saying this over and over to herself, but her brain refused to grasp the meaning of the words.

As she hastened forward she found herself gazing intently at a large bird perched on a bare branch high among the tree-tops. A hideous vulture it was, with a bald head—obscene, loathsome; its fleshy neck encircled by a frill of shabby feathers.

She was completely absorbed for the moment in the contemplation of this revolting object; and it was not until she caught her foot in a trailing creeper and nearly fell down, that she came to herself, and recollected where she was, and what she was doing.

Often will the mind, overburdened with anxiety or distress, find temporary respite in this way, by concentrating itself on some trivial, irrelevant object—the carpet's pattern in the surgeon's room, the ticking of a

clock, or the fluttering of the blinds in the chamber of death.

On reaching the camp she waited impatiently whilst Stubbs went to fetch the newspaper; then, scarcely stopping to thank him, she hurried away to her tent, spread it out on the bed, and kneeling beside it, eagerly scanned the headlines.

“‘Frontier Rising’ . . . ‘Fiscal Policy’ . . . nothing about it here! Ah,” with a cry, catching her breath, “what’s this?” . . . ‘An Officer’s Court Martial—Lieutenant Dare. . . .’”

The letters danced before her eyes—flies buzzing about the corpse of her dead hopes—and for some moments she could not make out the words.

Then, with an effort, mastering her emotion, she forcibly concentrated her attention and, only half comprehending the meaning of the legal terms, read as follows:—

“‘In the Court Martial held at Ghazipur on Lieutenant Dare, Westshire Regiment, the Judge Advocate said in his summing up that it was the duty of the Court to find, regarding the charge: firstly, whether at the place and on the date stated the accused struck or used insubordinate language towards Captain Grant; and secondly, whether the accused was inferior in rank to Captain Grant.

“‘Captain Grant stated on oath that the accused struck him, and made use of the precise language set out, as well as other abusive terms which the witness had forgotten.

“‘It was for the Court to say whether the defence, by cross-examination or otherwise, had thrown any reasonable doubt on the credibility or the veracity of the witnesses for the prosecution.

“‘The Army List showed that Captain Grant was a ‘superior’ to the accused. This superiority was perhaps not great, but it existed, so that the point was established.

“‘The Law would be found in Section 8, Part 2 of the Army Act, as to every person subject to Military Law who commits any of the following offences—that is to say, ‘Strikes, or uses, or offers violence to his superior officer.’ It might be observed that provocation by Captain Grant to the accused would not justify or excuse violence or improper language.

“‘It fell to the Court to decide what had happened at the club on the twenty-second of January between the accused and Captain Grant. . . .’”

“The night of the dance,” Phillis whispered with dry lips, “when I sent. . . . Oh, no, no! surely I am not responsible for this. . . .”

For a while the horror of the thought that possibly it was she herself who had been the cause—the unwitting cause—of Peter’s outbreak, overwhelmed her.

Why, why had she sent Captain Grant to look for him that night? . . . She knew how they hated one another! It was she . . . she who was to blame. It was her fault . . . all her fault.

And she flung herself face downwards on the bed, sobbing pitifully—heart-broken.

That she of all people—she who cared more for Peter than for all the rest of the world put together, who would far rather have died than injure him in any way, than cause him a moment’s unhappiness—should have been the means of disgracing him, of bringing about his ruin!

"Peter, Peter!" she sobbed aloud in her misery. "Oh, forgive me, forgive me!"

For a long time she lay there, cold and motionless, as though drowned in the dark flood Despair, whose rushing tides surged over her.

Was there no hope? Could she do nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . to help him? Oh, the misery of being a woman! She must go back to Ghazipur at once. She would see the Court—the judges. She would tell them about him. How brave he was. How splendid. And that other, who was not fit. . . . She would tell them about him too. She must go at once—at once. And she sprang up from the bed. The Court would understand. She would explain the sort of man Captain Grant was. And they would probably try *him* then, and turn *him* out when they had let Peter go.

Was there anything more in that ridiculous paper, she wondered, her eyes falling on it as it lay, crumpled and tear-stained, beside the bed. Picking it up, she went on reading from the place where she had left off—

"'It fell to the Court to decide what had happened at the club on the twenty-second of January between the accused . . .—that was Peter—the accused indeed! How dared they! As though he were a criminal! . . . 'and Captain Grant. The Court had the evidence before it, and in considering all the points, the Court should recollect that the accused was entitled to the benefit of every reasonable doubt. . . .' Well, *he* thinks Peter oughtn't to be punished anyway. Why, what's this . . . 'The decision of the Court will be promulgated when confirmed by the Commander-in-Chief. Meanwhile the accused was escorted back to his quarters

under . . .’” and here her tears broke out afresh, “‘under close arrest.’”

What does it mean? Is it all over? Surely it can't be. The whole trial finished! The prisoner condemned.

Had he not been found guilty she knew he would have been released then and there.

“And I can't help after all. Oh, Peter, Peter!” she sobbed, throwing herself again upon the bed. “It seems so hopeless—so inhuman—so cold-blooded. What do they care? And it's all done, apparently. Irrevocably settled. ‘The Court's decision’ . . . and I can do nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . and it's all my fault.”

She was back once more in the depths of woe, helpless in the bitter waters of affliction.

CHAPTER XVII.

"'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

OLD David, a forlorn figure, stood at the gate of the drive that led to his young master's house.

Wearily he warmed his old bones in the wan light of the wintry sun scarce risen; wistfully he watched the windows, waiting for a sign that Peter was awake, and needed him.

Very frail and shadowy he looked, very thin and wizened, as he stood there, leaning against the gatepost.

In the glowing light of day the network of his multitudinous wrinkles—knee-deep, they were, Peter used to say—showed with uncompromising distinctness, and every bristling silver hair of his moustache and beard, gleamed white against the black background of his worn, anxious old face.

Dreary had been his days of late, dismal and desolate.

When first Peter had been placed under arrest, the poor old man had not, in the very least degree, been able to understand what was the matter. There was something wrong, he knew, but he could not make out what it was.

His master was not sick. He did not stay in bed.

The Doctor-Sahib had not been. Why, then, did he never go out? Why were all his meals sent over to him from the Mess? Why did none of the other officers ever come to see him? What did it all mean?

Then came the trial; and old David was no longer left in doubt.

His master had been doing something wrong—something dreadfully wrong, apparently.

But what could it be? What crime was there that his beloved Sahib could have committed?

Certainly, it was not beating the servants. The master was, if anything, too kind to his servants. A good beating every now and then did some of these low-caste sweepers good.

Rubbing together his old hands—lank and brown as the ribbed sea sand—David chuckled to himself as he thought of a former master of his who, years ago, had been fined for beating one of his servants. Directly after the trial, the Sahib had caught the man, and beaten him again . . . very much beating . . . and had again been run in and fined. But on the second occasion he had appeared in Court, armed with an enormous bag of rupees . . . the price of many beatings . . . saying that he was prepared to pay it all, to the very last rupee, for the pleasure of chastising a servant who was such a rogue, and vowing that he looked upon it as money well spent.

But that was in the old days, before the English had spoilt the black men—spoilt them as children are spoilt by excessive kindness; by petting and pampering them instead of punishing; by coddling and cosseting them, instead of controlling. Pish! He had no patience with such folly. . . .

He was startled from his reverie by the sharp sound of trotting hoofs on the road close beside him.

A slim figure in a grey habit on a chestnut horse was between him and the sun.

With mournful dignity, the old man salaamed low to this dazzling vision. The Miss-Sahib from the Commissioner's was his master's friend, he knew. Often had he seen them riding together.

"Where is the Sahib?" Phillis inquired tremulously, her sweet face drawn and white with suffering, the halo of her fair hair shining bright against the sun. "Where is he? I must see him."

"Master never seeing," was David's reply, inexorable in its tone of hopeless finality.

"But I must see him at once. Go and tell him, please."

"Master never seeing, Miss-Sahib . . . never seeing. That his order."

"Oh, what can I do? What can I do?" she cried in desperation, beating together her little gloved hands. "Wouldn't he come out into the verandah and talk to me . . . just for a minute?"

"Master never speaking, Miss-Sahib. . . . Never speaking," replied poor old David, standing very stiff and upright, whilst the tears trickled down his furrowed, withered cheeks. "Never speaking for many days. . . ."

This was more than Phillis could bear. Catching her breath painfully, she stammered—

"I . . . I . . . I'll write to him," and turning her horse's head, she galloped away.

Blinded with tears, bending low in the saddle, her slender body shaken with uncontrollable sobs, she sped recklessly down the road.

David stood watching her as she flew along—a little cloud of sunlit dust—until she disappeared in the distance.

“For my part, I don’t believe a word of it. That ass Platitude has got hold of the wrong end of the stick, as usual. . . .”

Denison was furious with them all.

Pacing up and down the ante-room, he lashed each of his brother officers in turn with the scourge of his merciless tongue.

Fools, clowns, idiots, dolts that they were! Surely they could see it was a ‘put up’ job! Was it likely that Peter would knock the fella down for saying something about a horse? It was ridiculous. They might have known *that* much. And why on earth hadn’t it been hushed up, he would like to know. What the devil did they want to go dragging the regiment’s name in the mud like that for? . . . The papers were full of the damned thing. Lord, if only he had been there!

Travel-stained and weary, he had arrived in Ghazipur only that afternoon, having come back just as fast as boat and train could bring him, all the way from Japan.

On hearing the news that Peter had been placed under arrest, and would probably be tried by Court Martial, he had at once thrown up his leave, and started off post haste to the rescue.

He knew what bitter enemies the boy would have to contend with in Grant, and spiteful, treacherous Snake. The Colonel, too, who had taken a dislike to him, partly owing to the ‘nose-pulling incident,’

but more largely on account of his friendship with Anstruther, would be pretty sure to 'run' the case for all it was worth. He felt that if only he could get back in time he would be sure to find a hundred ways in which he could be of assistance to his unfortunate subaltern.

But lethargic Eastern trains that sauntered slowly, indifferent to his impatience, combined with malicious, deliberate boats that never would fit in, had—delay upon tedious delay—made the long journey almost interminable.

The very stars in their courses had fought against him!

And now at last he had arrived only to find that all was over,—that he was too late.

The sentence had not yet actually been promulgated, but there was little doubt in his mind that it would be dismissal, in some form or another. He hoped that, under the circumstances, the boy might be allowed to resign his commission. That was a little less revoltingly degrading than being publicly branded as an officer for whose services his Majesty had no further use. Poor old Peter, he happened to be one of the very best officers his Majesty had got in the whole of his army . . . if only his Majesty knew!

It was maddening.

And now in addition, piling on the agony, here was a letter from Anstruther—written on his arrival in England, before he had heard of the Court Martial—to say that it was quite impossible to approach old Sir Peter yet awhile, on the subject of his scapegrace nephew's debts, as the poor old man was nearly off his head with grief at the death of his young wife. She

had never, it appeared, regained her strength after the birth of the longed-for son and heir, who—according to Anstruther—was ‘a poor sickly undersized little snipe of a chap, to have been the cause of such a lot of trouble and misery.’

“What can I do?” groaned distracted Denison. “What the devil can I do?”

He could see Grant, of course, and tell him he was a liar. But that wouldn't be very much use to any one. He might even go and have a ‘turn up’ with the Colonel. But what would be the good of that? One thing he made up his mind to do—to find out the truth. He knew that this was a trumped-up charge. Grant was a liar; Platt a fool; the Colonel a bully; and Seton . . . well, Seton, as everybody knew, was a snake. If only he himself had been there at the time! Now it was too late—too late.

Just then, looking out of the window, he saw in the distance, moving moodily along in the direction of the Mess, a familiar, ungainly figure. The slouching walk seemed to be even more slovenly than usual, the heavy feet dragged slowly, listlessly along; the heavy head hung forward, ponderously forlorn.

It was poor puzzle-brained old Platt, miserably uncomprehending, perplexedly repentant; unable to understand the nature of his offence, but feeling acutely its enormity.

Peter had given him such a look at the Court Martial. He couldn't get over it. . . . But what did it mean? What in the name of all that was holy had he done to deserve it? For the life of him, he couldn't tell.

He had been compelled to attend the Court Martial as a witness for the prosecution—ordered to give his

evidence, hadn't he? No one could possibly suppose that he wanted to be mixed up in the beastly thing. Peter must have known that he was there under compulsion . . . that he would far rather not have spoken at all.

He had seen the blow struck, and heard what had been said, of course. There was no way out of *that*. He couldn't help it. Surely Peter didn't expect him to lie about it! And if not, why on earth did he look at him like that—just as if he thought him the lowest-down sort of sweep imaginable, not fit to live . . . a traitor . . . a Judas . . . a serpent's tooth . . . a broken reed. . . . What could it all mean? Never had any fella that he had ever heard of been in such a quandary . . . such a dilemma . . . such a cul-de-sac . . . such a blind Sally . . . call it what you would, as he was in!

"Hi, Platt, come in here a minute, I want to speak to you," cried Denison, leaning out of the window.

Platt looked up, and started a little when he saw who it was that was hailing him.

"I wish I was dead," was his dolorous greeting, a minute later, as he entered the room.

"Rubbish!" said Denison, unfeelingly. "Tell me the whole story now, from beginning to end.

And Platt, labouring through a labyrinth of repetition and tautologous circumlocution, told his tale.

"You mean to tell me," stormed Denison when it was finished, "that Peter knocked the fella down just because he said Stella was a jade!"

"Yes," replied Platt, glumly positive.

"You are perfectly certain you heard the word Stella used, are you?"

"Yes, Stella . . . or your pony . . . or she . . . or words to that effect."

"Words to that effect! To what effect, I should like to know? Do you mean you heard Grant say 'She is a jade!'"

"Yes."

"*She. She. She!* Why should you jump to the conclusion at once that they were talking about Stella?"

"Oh, there's no doubt about that—it was just after the race, you know. I heard him say something about losing, and that she was a little jade. It couldn't have b-been any one but Stella, you know."

"Why not? Why the devil not? Little jade. It sounds much more as if he was talking about a woman. And I'll bet that's exactly what he was doing, the swine—the foul, infernal, anthraxed swine!"

Denison's expletives were always picturesque and unexpected.

Platt was utterly taken aback by this view of the case. Until this moment it had never entered his head that Grant could have been talking of any one but Stella.

"And you—and you," went on Denison mercilessly, "you who call yourself his friend, come forward with a story like this. . . . With evidence based on your own idiotic imagination. . . . Built up out of nothing at all. . . . The very words, I've no doubt, put into your futile mouth. Bah! I've no patience with you. Go away—the sight of you makes me sick. I didn't think that the whole British army contained such a miserable, feeble-minded nincompoop!"

"B-but M-major," protested Platt abjectly. "I

argued the whole thing out again and again in my mind, and came to the conclusion. . . ."

"Bah! Did Grant tell you what to say, or did he not?"

"No. . . . Not exactly."

"What do you mean by not exactly?"

"W-well, it wasn't so m-much what *he* said, as what *I* s-saw and heard. I . . . I argued the whole thing out. . . ."

"Oh, there's no need for you to trot out your spavined old arguments and put them through their doddering paces at this time of day. You have probably been the means of causing a brother officer to lose his commission . . . that's all. And I hope," grimly, "I hope you're satisfied."

"W-well, here's . . . here's Seton, M-major," stammered Platt, on the defensive, plaintively resentful. "He'll tell you I d-did all I could. I . . . I . . . I . . ."

"Grrrr . . . the Snake. I wouldn't trust him a yard . . ."

Seton, with an ingratiating smile of welcome, came sidling across the room to where Denison, a storm-cloud on his brow, sat glowering.

"Hullo, Denison," he began, "this is an unexpected pleasure. Surely your leave's not up yet, is it?"

Frowning at him, Denison snapped out—

"What devil's games are these that you've been up to whilst I've been away?" Then, without waiting for him to reply, he went on, "The Colonel and this West Indian fella, Grant, and you, I suppose,—as ever since you've been Adjutant you've always been at the bottom of all the mischief in the regiment—seem

to have been doing your damndest to get rid of the best officer we've got; seem to have been trying to hound him out of the service. What the devil do you mean by it?"

"Oh, hang it all," sniggered Seton, who never took offence if he could possibly help it, "it wasn't my fault this time. I don't know why you should always be so down on me. I did all I could, you know, Denison, to hush the beastly thing up, but the Colonel——"

"Oh, yes, the Colonel, of course; you always shelter yourself behind him, don't you?" snarled Denison, exasperated.

"I think it's a little hard," muttered Seton, "that I should be held responsible if any of your friends choose to get into trouble. I don't see what right——"

"Go to the devil," fumed Denison. "I know you—*Snake!*"

Thus goaded, the Honourable James, venomously triumphant, said sweetly—

"I am sure you'll be sorry to hear, Denison, since you feel so strongly about it, that Dare is leaving us; that the army is to be deprived of his valuable services; that, in fact, he's kicked out."

Denison sprang to his feet.

"Is that true?" he cried, looking sharply into Seton's shifty eyes. "Have you heard officially?"

"Yes; we got the sad news just now," sneered Snake, no longer surreptitiously hostile, but a declared foe. "He has been cashiered."

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ Is Memory most of miseries, miserable,
Or the one flower of ease in bitterest hell ? ”

ALONE sat Peter in his desolate room, whilst the shadows lengthened and the dying day grew dim.

Before him, spread out on the table, lay an official document which David had just brought in.

It was a formal intimation of the result of the Court Martial.

Mechanically he read it, and re-read it, and read it yet again.

There had never been any real doubt in his mind since the trial, what his sentence would be. And yet, now that his expectations were realised, now that the very worst that could happen to him, *had* happened, he was scarcely able to comprehend what it meant.

Cashiered !

This was the end, then. He was kicked out—disgraced.

Mentally he reviewed the sorry succession of events that had brought him to his present plight.

First there had been the loss of his step owing to Grant's promotion from the Jamaica Regiment. The magnitude of this misfortune had been increased a thousandfold by the insufferableness of his supplanter.

That he should have been passed over by such a miserable reptile—that was what had hurt him most.

After that, the death of Lucifer, and the consequent deeper sinking into desperate debt.

This calamity had been closely followed by the receipt of the telegram that told of the arrival of yet another supplanter—a son and heir to old Sir Peter.

Fate had made of him a very Esau, supplanted and betrayed; and like him, his hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him.

Then had come Stella's defeat, and the ruin of all his hopes; the destruction of all his many plans for the future—a future in which Phillis. . . . But of her he must not allow himself to think.

Ever since that terrible day when Stella had failed him in his dire need, he had tried to put all thought of his old playmate out of his mind.

"And now . . . and now," he said to himself, his dry lips unconsciously forming the words, "now she will never understand . . . never. . . . But no, I will not think of her," and resolutely he drove away her haunting image that with such sweet persistency, do what he would, ever floated before his tired, sleepless, bitter eyes.

Farewell, happy, empty dreams! Grim reality alone remained.

Then there had been that dance—that fatal dance—to which he had gone so unwillingly.

Fate had driven him.

Fate, with yet another merry jest in store for him, with yet another freakish prank to play at his expense, had thrown Grant—jeering, jibing, oily, fat, *pink* Grant

—in his path, had exposed him to temptation such as no one could withstand.

Then, as if to crown all, had come Platt's defection. Incredible, inexplicable as it was, it somehow seemed now to be 'all of a piece' with the rest of this topsy-turvy time, when lies alone were current coin and truth of no avail.

Relentless fate had dealt him blow after pitiless blow; had stripped him of love, of friends, of ambition; and left him a disgraced and penniless outcast.

Was there no such thing as Justice in the world? Was Chance the sole controlling power that ruled men's lives? . . .

Or was there . . . after all, a mysterious Influence somewhere; a vast, incomprehensible Guiding Force which had set the stars for ever whirling in their measureless orbits, and the invisible electrons speeding on their headlong course.

A central point; unfathomably far; unimaginably remote—'The God behind the Pleiades'—round which revolved not only our vast Sun, mere speck that it was in the fiery immensity of the Milky Way, but all the mighty stars of all the Heavens, taking hundreds of thousands of millions of centuries to complete one single revolution in their interminable task.

Some such power he believed in—a power entirely apart from all human attributes; a force rather than a being; unalterable, relentless, rather than beneficent or cruel; comprising all good, and at the same time—all evil.

Not a Law-giver—but a Law. . . .

Then his thoughts drifted in another direction.

What a waste his whole life seemed . . . a waste of time . . . of money . . . of endeavour.

He was a failure.

He thought of the long, wearisome hours he had slaved in order to pass into Sandhurst . . . of the long, toilsome months—years rather—that he had spent in South Africa . . . of all that he had ever done, or tried to do, to fit himself for his profession. All wasted—wasted—wasted.

He thought of old Sir Peter who had always been so fond of him . . . so proud of him.

Poor old chap, there wasn't much reason for pride now!

He would feel the disgrace of this terribly . . . terribly. The disgrace to the name . . . to the family . . . the ignominy of it all.

Miserably he pictured the stern old martinet's wrath . . . his amazement . . . his sorrow.

Then bitterly he reminded himself that the arrival of an heir at Croyston had, of course, put things—so far as he was concerned—on quite a different footing.

"The old man won't care now," he told himself, "he won't care. Nobody'll care. Why should they?"

He thought of the home he had forfeited—of the friends he had lost—of the happy, memory-laden past that lay behind him—of the future, blank and pitiless, before.

What a mess he had made of his miserable life—over now, before he was twenty-eight. . . .

Not that it had really been a miserable life—far from it.

He had had his share of pastime; rather more than

his share, perhaps—and he had had his share of toil—of adventure—of sport.

What a glorious time that had been in Kashmir, for instance, the first summer after he had come out from home.

He had gone for a 'shoot' for three blissful months in the beautiful wilds.

What a joy it had been, scrambling over the craggy heights after ibex and markhor; and later, in the peaceful smiling valleys, up to his knees in flowers, fighting his way through butterflies, in search of the wily, black bear.

Many and many a night, too, had he spent lying out under the stars, waiting—and generally waiting in vain—for some of the black marauding monsters to come and be killed.

The memory of one thrilling night in particular came back to him. . . . He had been crouching for what seemed almost like a lifetime in the shadow of a large rock, which stood out black and shining in the moonlight, from the heaving waves of a turbulent sea of corn that tossed and swirled in the gusty mountain breeze.

On those bleak, steep slopes, the cornfields—he could see them now—were ranged in narrow terraces, mere strips of precarious cultivation, one above the other roughly buttressed and revetted with great stones that formed a narrow, grey containing wall between each step in the continuous golden ladder of the hillsides.

How cold it had been. . . . He had lain shivering, huddled in the black shadow of the rock, whilst clouds scudded across the moon, and the corn rustled incessantly.

All at once he had heard a loud snuffling behind him, and turning his head, had seen the corn on the step below him, oscillating violently, rippling and surging and swaying to and fro—evidently agitated by the rapid passage of some large body, no portion of which, however, he could actually see.

Grasping his rifle, he had crept cautiously downwards to the edge of the step, and peered over, trying to locate the intruder. In vain—absolutely in vain.

A hundred times, deceived by the incessant movement of the restless corn, which seemed to be shaken, now here, now there, by something more than the wind alone, he had felt certain he had marked down his quarry, and covering the suspected spot with his rifle, had been sorely tempted to press the trigger.

Each time, however, he had thought better of it, and pausing to make quite certain before he fired, had invariably seen the imaginary disturbance subside into the regular rhythmic sway that dishevelled all the rest of the wind-swept whirlpool of whispering corn.

Then . . . how he had jumped! He smiled now as he thought of it. A blood-curdling sound from an entirely unexpected quarter—and apparently from very close indeed—had thrilled him with excitement.

The deep breathing of some huge, invisible animal—evidently as yet unaware of his presence—seemed suddenly to envelop him, and deafeningly to fill his straining ears.

Turning quickly, he just managed to catch a momentary glimpse of a dark, shadowy object that disappeared instantly amidst the corn on the step above him.

Doubtless it was another bear come to dine.

Just then a black cloud drifted across the moon, and plunged the whole field into darkness.

Holding his breath, he had silently, with painful caution, made his way towards the bear whose stertorous breathing was all the time distinctly audible.

How it had ever got so close to him without his hearing it, he never could understand. For the sound of its snoring snuffle and asthmatic gasps, as it tore down armful after armful of the ripe, standing corn, and swallowed it greedily, seemed literally to fill the air.

Noiselessly, step by careful step, he had advanced to the attack—rifle ready—ears and eyes intent.

The black shadow of the cloud still hid the moon; nothing could he see; nothing but the vague, misty outline of the corn that danced and swayed indifferent to his doings.

And all the time the crunching, slavering sound of the midnight meal went on.

At length, having stealthily approached, with infinite pains, until he felt exactly as if he had only to stretch out his hand in the darkness to be able to touch the warm, shaggy coat of the savage beast, he had been brought up short by suddenly encountering the rough stone wall with which the seven-foot step to the terrace above, was faced.

Cautiously he had laid his rifle on the ground at the extreme edge of the upper field, and had just been preparing to climb up after it, when—with a loud 'woof' of indignant surprise, and a vast clatter of falling rocks and stones—the black monster, incredibly swift, had swept like an avalanche through the corn, and disappeared.

They hadn't all escaped him like that though, as a

ferocious-looking stuffed monster which stood on its hind legs, docilely holding aloft a great lamp in the old banquetting-hall at Croyston, bore witness. Huckle had brought out a ridiculous story with him from home about it. How the big man had laughed when he told it—how he had rocked and roared and trumpeted like an elephant.

One of the old village mothers, so he said, had been overheard at the annual Tenants' Feast, when the Hall was thrown open, telling her wide-eyed offspring that, "Yon" was "one of them Baws as Mr Peter shot in the War."

Dear old villagers. Dear old Croyston. Dear old life that he loved. How the memory of it all came back to him now—now that he was cut off from it for ever. His merry graceless boyhood. His happy careless youth. School-time. Holidays. Shooting. Hunting. The never-to-be-forgotten, brave days of long ago.

He thought of the first time he had ever been allowed to ride to hounds. . . . Of a jolly little pony—sure-footed as a goat, and clever as a cat—on which, as a boy, he had always been able, *somehow*, to get over the very worst of that difficult country; scrambling up places that were too big to be jumped; sliding down banks; wriggling through fences; galloping helter-skelter down slopes so steep that the horses couldn't even attempt them at anything but the most moderate pace; and succeeding, nearly always, in being in at the Death.

Then, what triumphant events had been the shooting of his first pheasant, the capture of his first trout, and earlier still—since stolen sport has always an added

zest for a boy—the netting of his first rabbit, the snaring of his first hare.

And intimately connected with all these memories of adventure by Flood and Field—forming part, indeed, of every one of the many pictures of the past that floated before his eyes—was John Huckle. . . . John, with his unspeakable smile, his rolling gait, and his adoring, dog-like gaze.

Dear old John. . . . How faithfully he had stuck to him in this black time. What whole-hearted, what priceless loyalty he had lavished upon him. Regularly twice a week had he come over in one of his cars, all the way from Pindi, to inquire from David—in very limited Hindustani—whether Sahib was ‘righto.’

Often and often, hidden behind the curtain, he had surreptitiously looked out, and his eyes had been gladdened by the sight of his old friend. But hitherto he had never done more than just send out a message that he was quite well; he had not been able to face the ordeal of seeing any one—even John.

But now. . . . now it was different. There was nothing to wait for. Once more he was a free man. Free! . . . save the mark! What was such freedom worth? . . . He was free to go and hide his head; to go and bury his disgrace far away, out of sight somewhere. Somewhere . . . but where—where in the name of Heaven was he to go? What was to become of him? . . . Perhaps John, who was so practical, would be able to tell him what to do. Perhaps, even, he would help to get him away . . . to get him quietly away, so that he would not have to face any of his old acquaintances. He did not wish to see any one he knew, ever, ever, ever again . . . except John. Suppose John

came now, and took him away in his car . . . right away, without a soul catching a glimpse of him. . . .

In his eager impatience to be off, Peter began feverishly pacing up and down the room.

He must do *something*. . . . Go somewhere now—now at once. Where could John be? Why was he so late? This was one of the days on which he always came . . . surely, wasn't it? Regular as clockwork he had been till now. What did it mean? Never before had he missed. . . . Could it be that he had deserted him, now that he was an outcast . . . a pariah? Was the friendship, upon which he had just been congratulating himself, worth no more than this? Bah! . . . Every one, of course, would shun him now, as if he had the plague. . . . And John . . . John was quite right to side with the majority—to do as others did. The poor chap had his way to make in the world, and naturally couldn't afford to be friends with a convict. A convict! For that was what he was, now he had been found guilty, *convicted* by Court Martial. . . .

But even as the poor, harassed, embittered boy revolved these extravagantly morbid and unjust thoughts in his mind, the welcome sound of a motor-horn, far down the road, proved to him how wrong he was. John had not forsaken him.

A few minutes later, his old friend was in the room.

"Thank God, you've come, John," was Peter's husky greeting. "Take me away with you now—now, this very moment."

CHAPTER XIX.

“Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.”

THE car had scarcely disappeared down the winding road, and the dust of its departure was still hanging in the air, when Denison, furious at his inability to be of the slightest assistance to Peter, came storming over to the deserted bungalow.

From an incoherent statement extracted with difficulty from the weeping David, whom he found crouched upon the doorstep, he gathered that Peter had gone off with Huckle, never to return.

The old familiar house looked very dreary and desolate in the dismal light of the stable-lantern that David carried, as together they went from room to dim depressing room.

In all directions loomed shadowy cupboards, ransacked shelves, drawers left open, doors thrown wide.

Everywhere were signs of frenzied packing—clothes scattered hither and thither, torn papers in disorderly confusion, discarded *débris* of a hurried flight.

On the most comfortable chair in the sitting-room, beside the empty grate, lay Eton Girl, who at their

approach wagged a lazy, uninterested, flabby tail in greeting.

Daily of late, with the utmost regularity, she had made a practice of visiting Peter at meal-times, finding with gluttonous glee that by so doing she was able very substantially to increase the already heavy burden that she was accustomed to putting upon her overworked digestive organs.

Never by any chance had the poor unfortunate prisoner been able to bring himself to do more than eat the very smallest portion of what was sent over to him from the Mess, and in consequence the old spaniel had reaped an exceeding rich reward, eating herself more and more out of shape at every meal.

Without loss of time Denison hunted her ruthlessly off her chair and out into the garden, violently apostrophising her the while as a hideous gargoyle, a loathsome gollywog, battenning vampire-like on the misfortunes of others.

Then finding nothing further upon which he could wreak his vengeance, and with the rage of baffled endeavour glowing hot in his heart, he took his departure from the gloomy scene of desolation.

In time for the next mail he wrote the following long letter to Anstruther :—

“DEAR ‘A,’—You will have seen in the papers all about the Court Martial. It has been a wretched business throughout; mismanaged from the very beginning—or rather, managed too well—by that cunning beast, Grant. I can’t actually *prove* anything, but I know it was a ‘put-up’ job. Evidence fabricated. Facts distorted. Misleading half-truths given the appearance of

conclusive proofs. You know the sort of thing. Whilst for the defence, sullen defiance that would brook no interference, that would give no explanation whatever, seems to have been the impossible line adopted by the unfortunate boy.

"I have not been able to get quite to the bottom of Platt's connection with the case. That he didn't lie intentionally I am pretty sure. He is not that sort. Somehow or other Grant made him believe that the row was simply and solely about Stella's not winning her race, and got him to give evidence to that effect.

"Of course the idea is ridiculous. At his very maddest, Peter could never have done such an utterly idiotic, such an unthinkable thing, as to knock down a brother officer—or any one else, for that matter—because he made some disparaging remarks about a horse. On the face of it, it's absurd. Far more likely to have been about a woman. Probably the brute had been saying something derogatory about some lady of Peter's acquaintance. You know the kind of swine he is, and the way he talks when there is no one by to kick him! But how one is to reconcile this theory with Platt's evidence, I'm blest if I know. I wish to God you or I had been here at the time; things would never have got into such a mess.

"As it was, what with gullible Platt, sly Snake, and that vindictive beast, Grant, on the one side, and Peter, stubborn and defiant—his lips honourably sealed, or some dam rot of that sort—on the other, disaster was inevitable. In this rotten, futile way, have we lost one of our best officers. Certainly he was far and away the best of the younger generation. And in order to achieve this undesirable result, we have had to submit

to being pilloried in the public press to such an extent that as a regiment we are now, I imagine, notorious throughout the Service.

"On this particular occasion the C.O., as you might expect, was all for blood, and I think is now congratulating himself on having got rid of a desperate character, something in the nature of a Paris '*apâche*.' Personally, as you know, I have always been a zealous advocate of discipline and subordination, and all that sort of thing. But this, as they say in America, is 'the limit!' I feel more inclined, just now, than ever before in my life, to subscribe to your seditious dictum that 'Commanding Officers as a race are detestable!' with the addition of a rider of my own that 'An ounce of tyranny in the present weighs more than a ton in the future or the past.'

"There is no use in attempting to disguise the fact that it is largely our new Colonel whom we have to thank for this scandal. The case could easily have been hushed up in the first instance, doubtless would have been by any other C.O. in the whole world. It seems that we got more than our deserts when the unjust gods served out Colonel Punch to us as our Commanding Officer.

"It will doubtless surprise you to hear that his popularity with the rank and file is not noticeably on the increase. You would have been amused to see him this morning. His charger was lame, so, as he had nothing else to ride on parade, I lent him one of my horses, Battleaxe, and I'm blest if the humorous old beast didn't take the opportunity of bucking him off

right into the very middle of a company that was marching along with fixed bayonets—it's a marvel he was not impaled! I am sorry to say he still seems to find a very great deal to complain of in the way everything in the regiment is run.

"My colour-sergeant's wife, poor woman, is in his black books, owing to the fact that she possesses a parrot which has been taught to vary the monotony of the stereotyped—

"‘Pretty Polly, pretty dear,
All the way from Kashmir,’

by substituting for the second line the reprehensible and disrespectful words—

"‘Got a nose like Colonel Weir.’

"This accomplishment the blatant bird exhibited in the august presence of the Colonel himself when last he paid the regimental married quarters a state visit. *Lèse Majesté* with a vengeance!

"But to return to Dare's case. Instead of going over at once to his house when I arrived, and if necessary breaking in—as they told me he wouldn't see anybody—I pottered about like a fool for ever so long trying to sift, if possible, the truth from the lies in the ridiculous charges that had been brought against him; trying to see if I could get hold of something that might be of use for the defence; going through the evidence; cross-examining and brow-beating Platt; questioning Snake, who—venomous brute that he is—when I had thoroughly roused him by a few home-truths, literally spat the news at me

that Peter had been cashiered. Really, all the while in my idiotic heart of hearts I was rather shrinking from my first interview with the luckless prisoner. And so, when at last I did get over to his quarters, it was only to find the whole place in darkness, and the bird flown. Old David between his sobs informed me that his master had gone away 'in motor-cart,' and was 'never coming back.'

"I could have kicked myself for being such an ass. There was I, come all the way from Japan only to let him slip through my fingers at the last moment. I ought to have known that his first impulse—directly he heard what the beastly verdict was—would be to get away, to shake off the dust of Ghazipur from his feet for ever. And there was always that Huckle fellow hanging about handy in his car. Naturally he welcomed the chance of giving every one the slip.

"The next thing I've got to do is to discover where he is hiding. He's safe enough so long as he is with Huckle, that's one good thing.

"You will simply *have* to go and see Sir Peter now, my dear old chap, even if he has lost a dozen wives, and is utterly unapproachable! It is hard luck on you, I know, but I'm sure you'll agree that something must be done to help the boy. You'll be able to make the old man understand all right, won't you, that although it's bad enough in all conscience to be cashiered, still there is nothing dishonourable, nothing disgraceful, in what Peter has done.

"We all know, of course, that discipline must be maintained, and all that. Officers can't go knocking their seniors about without suffering for it. But

between being 'outed' for knocking a man down in a rage—possibly, as in this case, under great provocation—and being cashiered for dishonesty, or for scandalous conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, there is a great gulf fixed. If one hears that a man has been kicked out of the Service, one naturally jumps to the conclusion that he has done something disgraceful—probably something dishonourable, or, at the very least, something shady. And in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, one is perfectly right. But this is one of the hundredth cases, if ever there was one. Just compare it in your own mind with any of the other instances you know of,—with the case of that young Smith, for example, who borrowed five pounds from a brother officer, and altered the cheque to fifty! I always look upon that as a record in youthful villainy. But this—why, it's only because they both happen to be in the Service, that what, under ordinary circumstances would be a very natural, indeed a most laudable, action becomes a crime at all.

"When you get an opportunity of seeing old Sir Peter, do rub this well in, like a good chap. Remind him that the whole of the boy's future is in the balance—that he must on no account be allowed to go under.

"Mrs Curtis has been a perfect brick all through—a thorough partisan of Peter's. Thinks the Court Martial rubbish, the Colonel mad, and publicly cuts both Grant and Snake. She has been awfully good to that poor girl, Miss Montague, who was naturally most tremendously cut up about the trial—nearly off her head at one time I believe. And now, as a crowning

act of mercy she is going to take her away on a regular round of gaiety, so she told me in confidence, from one festive Week to another, just to cheer her up! Aren't women queer? *I* can imagine no more awful fate than to be condemned to go to one after another of those horrible, dreary, gay Weeks, in search of pleasure as a cure for melancholy. I have heard of people at home who steadily follow the strawberry season, as it gradually recedes northwards, all the way from Land's End to John o' Groats. Such gorgeous gluttony as that, sounds almost noble compared with this futile pursuit of unenjoyable gaiety.

"And now there seems to be nothing left for me to do until Peter is traced, except to make, if I can—and I rather think I can—Grant's life a burden to him; a misery, a weariness of the flesh, what Platitude would call a 'Homicide's feast of Red Sea Apples!' It's rather mortifying to think that it is all through this well-meaning blunderer of a Platt that the case ever came to a Court Martial at all. If he hadn't been such a mug—ready to swallow *any* suggestion, however improbable, of that plausible Amorous Ape's, ready apparently to repeat *any* words that any one happened to be kind enough to put into his mouth—nothing would ever have been heard of it.

"The general tendency now is to pity the noodle. 'Poor old Platt, it is hard luck on him having to give evidence against his best pal,' and so forth. Personally I have no pity for him. The well-intentioned idiot has done more harm than the lying Grant, the venomous Snake, and the 'bullyragging' Colonel put together. But for him, not one of them would have

been able to do anything, and Peter would still be with us.

"The longer I live, the more it is borne in upon me, that in this world it is the fools who work most of the mischief. One can guard oneself to a certain extent against the machinations of the malicious, but who can protect himself from the fatuous folly of the friendly fool? I have never any sympathy whatever with the fool—with the honest, good-hearted, mutton-fisted fool. The fool who, by his blundering, plays havoc with the very 'best laid' of schemes; who, on Service, blindly, stolidly, steadily, nobly, leads his men into an ambush; who stupidly, obstinately, magnificently, rushes headlong to destruction; who, goaded by the fear of being accused of 'want of initiative,' undertakes with disastrous results the Titanic task of 'thinking for himself,' and runs his thick head gloriously up against every available wall. We don't want fools in the Army. Of all the professions, soldiering is the one that can least afford them. Therefore I say that there is no room in the Service nowadays for Platt and his kind. They should go.

"Would that we could get short-sighted, selfish parents and guardians to realise that the Army is no dumping-place for their fool sons, for their wastrel wards; that the very best they can give us, the pick of their smug Suburban baskets—our supply of officers from the Suburbs and from similar squalid localities is, I am told, largely on the increase; thus far in the social scale have we sunk—falls lamentably short of what we require and expect and demand. . . .

Good-bye, old man. I think I'm in for a go of fever—
must have got a chill in that beastly train. I can
feel my temperature going up by leaps and bounds.
Please make due allowances for intemperate language—
Ever yours,

FITZROY DENISON.

CHAPTER XX.

"The huge shipwreck of my own esteem,
And all that's dear."

"How would this do for you, Master Peter, sir?" said John Huckle, as creaking discordantly—like some great crazy waggon whose wheels were badly in need of oil—he came lumbering into the garage at Culcutta where Peter was hard at work, and handed him a letter.

"Why, what is it?" asked Peter, wiping desperately oily fingers on his apron, preparatory to holding out a grimy hand for the note.

A very subdued-looking, drab-coloured Peter this, with his weary face and serious expression; a Peter in whom there was already little or no trace of the light-hearted, laughing subaltern of the month before.

"Seems to be just the sort of thing you are looking for, sir," replied John. "Though why you won't stay on here with us beats me, it does," and he slowly shook his massive head to and fro in lugubrious and disapproving perplexity. "You are worth a lot more to the Firm than we pay you, sir—now you've got your licence and all. And we are quite ready to take you into partnership any time, as you know. . . ."

"No, no, John, it's awfully good of you, but it would never do," broke in Peter.

This had been his invariable reply to the handsome offer of a half-share in the business which Huckle had made him at least a dozen times a-day since his arrival, and which he had felt obliged as often to refuse.

When they had gone off together in the car so hurriedly from Ghazipur, the sole thought in Peter's mind had been to escape from a situation that had become intolerable; to seek refuge in flight. Like a wounded animal, he had felt instinctively an over-mastering desire to get away; to hide his wounds, his scars of shame, in the deep shelter of some distant solitude. He longed to be alone to shake off the baleful shadow of the black cloud that so maliciously enveloped him, and far away, a stranger among strangers, to seek oblivion.

Scarcely knowing what he did, he had accompanied Huckle—whose business in Pindi was finished—as far as Calcutta; there, he thought vaguely, he would probably be able to get a ship to America or Australia, or somewhere where he could begin afresh, forget the past, and hide for ever in some welcome wilderness, the shameful story of his disgrace.

The faithful John, meanwhile, had evolved a prodigious plan. Like every undertaking that bears the hall-mark of genius, his scheme was of a sublime simplicity. Master Peter was to live, for the rest of his natural life, at the best hotel in Calcutta, whilst 'Messrs John Huckle & Co., Motor Car Agents and Practical Engineers,' were to enjoy the inestimable privilege of supporting him!

Naturally, Peter had scouted the idea, protesting, with base ingratitude, that all he wanted was work, work, hard work, and plenty of it.

And so, somehow, it came about that he had drifted in John's wake to the garage, where he had become so much interested, and had found that he could be of such very real service to the firm, that at length he had accepted a subordinate position on a small salary, his intention being to try eventually for a situation as chauffeur in some private establishment.

He could, he felt, be as completely lost in India as in any other part of the world, whilst his knowledge of Hindustani would be sure to stand him in good stead.

Perhaps this was the very chance he was hoping for, he thought, as he took the thick sheet of crested paper from John's hand, and, spreading it out, read as follows—

“Lieutenant Colonel Wyndham of the Blue Lancers . . . requires chauffeur immediately . . . must be European . . . to take charge of two cars . . . expert driver . . . Kashmir in the hot weather.’ Seems to do himself pretty well, eh John? And the pay, why,” with a feeble attempt at gaiety, “why, it compares favourably with what I’ve been getting in the Westshires, doesn’t it? Of course I’ll accept it, John, rather so, jump at it. I’ll send a wire this very minute, and start to-night.”

But John did not share his enthusiasm, and was still ruefully shaking his heavy head. He couldn’t bear the idea that the young master should be obliged to go out into the world and earn his living as a mechanic, no better than himself.

Whatever would Sir Peter say? . . . Why, he would never allow it for a moment. . . . But then, of course, the old gentleman didn’t know nothing whatever about it . . . nor couldn’t be told neither . . . not yet awhile

anyway, with his poor lady not cold in her grave. . . . But it wasn't right, it wasn't, for Master Peter to do that sort of work. Not but what he did it well—wonderful handy he was, and quick to learn. Seemed to have a natural turn for machinery, he did—what he called an 'instinct,' whatever that was. . . . Still, it wasn't fitting for him, a gentleman born, to have to work with his hands. . . . Anyway, not whiles John Huckle had one rupee to rub against another. . . . That obstinate the young master was though! 'Not a penny will I take as I haven't earned,' says he. 'Right you are, sir,' says I, 'but you've only got to say the word, Master Peter,' says I, 'and you're head of the whole blooming firm, sir,' says I.

Through John, who of course kept in touch with the old folks at Croyston, Peter had heard of his uncle's loss, but he had received no letters direct. This was scarcely to be wondered at, since there was no one in Ghazipur who knew to what address to forward the bundle of correspondence that had accumulated after his departure.

He had brought little or nothing away with him, leaving all his numerous possessions to his creditors.

Three precious relics of the past he treasured, hidden in his modest kit. Three precious letters from Phillis—two of them unopened.

She had written to him on that day when she had come back with the Cumberledges from the jungle, and had tried so hard to see him; when she had implored David to ask him to speak to her if only for a few minutes, and the old man's reply, 'Master never speaking for many days,' had sent her away crying so bitterly.

A piteous plea, this letter; a humble petition for forgiveness.

She had been the cause of the whole trouble, she felt sure. She it was who had sent Captain Grant to fetch him that night. . . . It was all through her, she knew . . . all her fault. Wouldn't he see her, she begged, just for a minute. . . . Wouldn't he let her help? She was ready to do anything . . . anything for her dear Peter. She would lay down her life for him. Nothing else in the whole world mattered compared with his welfare. She would die if he wouldn't see her . . . and talk to her . . . and care for her again as he used to . . . and tell her that he forgave her. . . .

To this letter he had sent no reply. He had forced himself, although it tore his heart to do so, to leave it unanswered. It was better so, he told himself. She would forget the more quickly. . . . She must have no dealings with an outcast such as he.

Then had come the second letter. This he had not dared to open, lest his resolution might waver. Then the third.

He called himself a coward, a fool for not destroying them.

Now that this impassable barrier separated his life from hers, what use was there in clinging to the memory of such . . . such . . . sentimental folly!

Over and over again he repeated the words, sentimental folly, dinning them into his brain, his jaw set in bitter, resolute determination. But for all that, the letters escaped destruction, travelling safely with him wherever he went, and remaining, throughout all this dark, unhappy time, the dearest of his possessions.

That night at the Railway Station, as they waited for the up-country mail that was to bear Peter away to his new life, John Huckle took the opportunity of bestowing much sound and sensible advice upon the budding chauffeur.

"It'll come a bit strange just at first, Master Peter, sir, bound to, you being so new to it like . . ."

"Yes, John, of course, I'm only a tyro," replied Peter, with almost his old twinkle. The excitement of embarking on this new venture of his had brightened him up wonderfully, and he was in better spirits and more cheerful that evening than he had been ever since the disastrous Court Martial. "A tyro," he repeated, emphasising his small joke, "but when you come to think of it, what more suitable thing could a chauffeur be?"

To John, from the earliest days of their friendship, a great deal of Peter's conversation had always been quite unintelligible. The big man, with philosophical calm, had acquired a habit of passing over in stony and rather disconcerting silence—as though it had never been made at all—any incomprehensible remark which, in his opinion, was not for the likes of him to presume to understand.

He went on stolidly now—

"You don't need to worry yourself about meeting any folks what you know, sir, not a mite. No one would recognise you; you look that different without your moustache. Besides, you won't find no one pays much attention to the 'Shover,' sir, anyway. And when you are dressed up in your big coat for driving, why. . . ."

"Why, I'll look just like a grizzly bear with a taste

for yachting, won't I?" interrupted Peter, laughing up at the big man on whose account he had first requisitioned from the Comic Press this realistic description of the properly equipped chauffeur.

"Now mind you don't let yourself be put upon, Master Peter, sir," were John's parting words as the train crept slowly out of the station. "I am glad you're going to an officer, sir, that I am. Some of them civilians, big swells as they are, with big salaries too, aren't above cutting down a man's bills, and screwing the last farthing out of him. One of them I was with, mean little hound, begging your pardon, sir, was a regular Skylark . . . did his level best to get his pound of meat every time, he did. . . . Goodbye, sir. God bless you, Master Peter. Goodbye!"

Two days later, on arriving at his destination, the large cantonment of Calore where the Blue Lancers were stationed, Peter found that Colonel Wyndham had sent a cart down to meet his train, and in this he drove up to his new employer's bungalow.

There he was at once granted an interview, and realised almost at the first glance that he had indeed been in luck's way when he had accepted the 'job.'

Never before in his life had he been so taken with the appearance of any man.

Colonel Wyndham possessed indeed a very charming personality.

He was the beau ideal of a Light-Cavalry commander—tall, well-knit, spare, trim. *Smart* was no word for him!

His smooth hair very grey at the temples; his lean, good-looking face tanned by the sun; his keen, fearless, grey eyes surrounded by a network of wrinkles

that deepened when he smiled; his easy, friendly, pleasant, perfect manners, and his low, clear, delightful, cultured voice. Hitherto Peter had always imagined that such personages existed only in the realms of fiction. It seemed almost incredible that this paragon could possibly belong to what Anstruther called, 'The hated race of C.Os.,' that he was really a Colonel commanding a regiment. How different things might have been for him if the Westshires had been commanded by such a man. Did the right man never get command in the Infantry, he wondered. It really seemed almost as if this must be so. . . . He knew of dozens of cases of good men having to go for age, whilst rotters commanded battalions and played the devil with them. It seemed such wanton folly, such callous indifference, on the part of Government not to make more careful selections. . . . But he was forgetting. He was a chauffeur now, no longer concerned with such matters.

"I want to begin by asking a favour," Colonel Wyndham was saying. "You see, it's like this. One of these horrible Weeks is just coming off here . . . begins to-morrow, I believe . . . and as that sort of thing doesn't appeal to me very much, I'm going off to the jungle on ten days' leave in order to escape."

Peter delicately intimated that he quite understood . . . that he thought it very natural . . . that Weeks *were* trying. . . .

"Whilst I'm away," went on the Colonel, "I should be awfully obliged if you wouldn't mind taking over charge of another car, in addition to mine—just till I get back, you know. There's a man staying with us

for the races—er . . . er . . . a cavalry officer—whose chauffeur has gone sick, and I said I thought, as you wouldn't have very much to do whilst I was away, you know, that perhaps you wouldn't mind looking after his car for him, and driving him about when he wanted you. What do you say?"

"Of course I shall be only too pleased to do whatever you wish," replied Peter politely, with the friendliest of smiles.

Then suddenly he remembered that servants were not supposed to grin at their masters like that! Or talk like that! Or even stand like that!

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, drawing himself up very stiffly and assuming the wooden expression—recommended by John—that he had practised so assiduously before the little glass at the garage. "Very good, sir. Yessir. Certn'ly, sir," he continued, striving desperately to imitate the orthodox, jerky, syncopated utterance of which Sir Peter's smart, up-to-date valet—Ragtime Robert—was what they used to call him behind his back—was so distinguished an exponent. But somehow he didn't seem to be doing it very well, and all the time he felt himself getting guiltily redder and redder.

Colonel Wyndham looked at him quietly for a few moments; then a sympathetic smile deepened the creases round his eyes.

"My dear boy," he said, "you needn't bother to act with me. I'm not going to pry into your affairs—don't be afraid of that." Then, with a laugh, "I should have to be pretty blind, though, if I couldn't see through any one quite so transparently not what he seemed as you. But that's neither here nor there . . ."

as Peter began to stammer some halting explanation. "If I happen to get a . . . er . . . better class of man than I expected as chauffeur, so much the better for me."

And dismissing the subject once and for all in this way, he went on to explain minutely all about the cars; how that for some reason or another both of them had been giving trouble of late; and how that the chap who was looking after them, a native, was rather a 'poggie,' which he explained was the expressive Hindustani word for fool.

More and more delighted with his charming employer, who, quite as a matter of course, treated him all the while entirely as an equal, Peter spent a very agreeable half-hour, discoursing learnedly, in the unlovely jargon of the complete automobilist, upon gears and cylinders, radiators and tyres, carburettors and clutches, and all the rest of the complex machinery of the modern motor car.

It was nearly dark when eventually he went off bearing a note from Colonel Wyndham to the chauffeurless cavalry officer at whose disposal his services had temporarily been placed.

On the way he glanced at the envelope, and found to his amazement and disgust, and half ruefully amused indignation, that it was addressed to Captain Horatio Stubbs, 20th Dragoon Guards.

Stubbs! Phillis's Stubbs! The little bounder they had quarrelled about . . . the rich little cad who had come out in the same ship with her . . . whom probably one day she would marry. . . . And he—he—he—was to be his chauffeur . . . his servant! He couldn't do it. He simply couldn't do it. He must go back and tell Colonel Wyndham that it was im-

possible — utterly out of the question! He would explain. . . .

He turned and began to retrace his steps; then paused hesitatingly, swayed to and fro by conflicting emotions,—natural repugnance counselling refusal, interested curiosity advising acquiescence.

He would loathe being the servant of this Stubbs atrocity, even for a few days; but, on the other hand, there was no denying he would very much like to have a look at the fella . . . to see with his own eyes what sort of a chap Phillis's future husband might be . . . whether it seemed likely he would be kind to her . . . whether. . . . Hang it all, he couldn't expect much of any one with such a name—Horatio Stubbs!

For a long time he debated with himself, weighing the pros and cons; and the short Indian twilight had merged itself into 'night with her train of stars' before he had finally made up his mind.

He would be a fool not to take on the job, he decided. He was only a chauffeur—it was all in the day's work.

A few minutes later the letter was delivered.

"Oh, ah, you're Colonel's Wyndham's chauffaw, are yaw?" was the greeting vouchsafed him by the monied oaf, in ponderously superior Heavy - Dragoon manner, as he was ushered in.

Stubbs, redolent of all the perfumes of Arabia, flamboyant in the pitiless light of an incandescent lamp, was seated at a large writing-table, laboriously concocting a letter.

He looked up for a moment as he asked the question, but before Peter had time to reply, was absorbed once more in his tremendous task. Crouching low over

the table, all hunched up in the most constrained and uncomfortable attitude imaginable, he sat gazing fixedly at the broad point of his gold nib, awaiting inspiration.

Peter had ample time in which to observe every detail of this weird scene of labour, of painful travail with formless, unborn thought on the part of one in whose hands the sword—or any other weapon, for that matter—was so manifestly mightier than the pen.

Stubbs's undistinguished nose, shiny with good living, seemed—as he struggled in the throes of composition—almost to touch the superfine, cream-laid, flagrantly emblazoned note-paper. Indeed, so nearly did it rest upon the virgin page, that Peter could distinctly see, reflected in the ruddy, polished mirror of its surface, a faint, white, ghostly image of the snowy sheet.

And all the time the resplendent scribe kept gnawing, in abstracted fashion, the end of his reluctant pen, which shone—indented in a hundred places with the marks of his strong teeth—moist and repulsive in the lamplight.

“Colonel Wyndham told me,” said Peter, at length, “to come to you for orders.”

Stubbs looked at him vacantly, his thoughts far away, absorbed in the vain attempt to capture and transform into words an elusive idea that again and again just evaded him.

“Poor Phil,” mused Peter, studying the vulgar, vacuous face. “Poor, pretty little Phil, is this what you’re reduced to?”

Then the thought that it was, in all probability, to Phillis herself the creature was writing—that this

letter, for the proper wording of which he seemed to be hopefully awaiting some divine afflatus, some transcendent inspiration, was, perhaps, a labour of love . . . a declaration . . . stung him to sudden wrath.

Impatiently he made a movement that aroused the wool-gathering warrior.

"Hang it all, man," ejaculated Captain Stubbs, with a frown; "wait a minute; can't you see I'm thinkin'?"

Peter laughed.

At this outrage the harassed cavalry officer, invested with the majestic dignity conferred upon him by the noble heritage of the blood of all the Stubbses, stared haughtily amazed, whilst his good-humoured, commonplace countenance assumed an absurd air of arrogant intolerance.

That a dam chauffeur should dare to take such a dam liberty in his presence, dammy! he mentally blustered with indignation.

Glaring his hardest, his little round eyes trying vainly to look terrifying and impressive, he endeavoured to awe the delinquent into a suitable state of subserviency.

Peter smilingly met the inadequate glance that was to subdue him and put him in his place, without even, scandalous to relate, recognising that it was meant to be a look of lofty, aristocratic displeasure.

"What time shall I bring the car round for you to-morrow, Captain?" he inquired encouragingly.

He had triumphantly hit upon the idea of using the title Captain when speaking to his new employer, as a sort of halfway-house between the familiar address of equality and the 'sir' of servility, to which, under

the present circumstances, he found such difficulty in schooling his tongue.

To this question, Stubbs, heavily frowning, at first deigned no reply. Then, after a pause he brusquely blurted out—

“Here, I say, you . . . what . . . what’s your name?”

“I am Colonel Wyndham’s chauffeur,” answered Peter slowly and with great distinctness, “and I answer to the name of Jones.”

His words had a surprising effect.

Stubbs’ round red face broke into a broad smile, crumpled into a merry multitude of mirthful creases; the round eyes lost their glare, and positively danced; the round nose beamed benevolence; arrogance gave place to laughter, amazement to amusement.

“Sounds like an advertisement for a lost dog,” he guffawed. “Answers to the name of . . . haw . . . h-a-w. Now, look here, Jones,” he went on with a jerk, briskly business-like, all of a sudden, in spite of the remnant of the smile that lurked about the corners of his wide mouth, and twinkled in his little yellow eyes, “my motto, in dealing with subordinates, is ‘Do well, and you’ll be done well.’ That ‘don’t mean ‘done in the eye,’ you understand. You just do your work well, and I’ll make it jolly well worth your while. I can afford to!”

Peter was appropriately impressed by this grandiloquent promise of generous treatment.

“He’s pretty appalling,” he thought; “bounder written all over him . . . but probably quite good-natured. Poor Phil! I should think he would jar a bit, especially when he laughs. I wonder,” bitterly, “how

many thousands a year it takes to compensate for a laugh like that! Why on earth should he saturate himself with scent, too. She will have to have him thoroughly disinfected before marrying him! It wouldn't be a bad thing to have some of the superfluous colour washed out of him at the same time," he continued, looking with fastidious distaste at Stubbs' tomato-like visage and gorgeous get-up, "and not only out of him, but out of his flaring, opulent surroundings, and his rich, revolting clothes. Grrrr!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"This truth of old was sorrow's friend,
Times at the worst will surely mend."

IN one of the bright, unsympathetic little bedrooms of the Imperial Hotel, Calore, sat Phillis, paper-knife in hand, mechanically curling the dejected feathers of her best hat.

From race-week to tedious race-week on a dreary round of gaiety had the poor child, piteously reluctant, been dragged by the indefatigable Mrs Curtis.

Gay, butterfly little Mollie had been kindness itself to her since her return from the Keddah, doing everything she could think of to rouse her, to force her to take an interest in her surroundings, and to distract her thoughts from constantly brooding despondent over Peter's shattered fortunes. Finally, as a cure for the unhappy girl's invincible melancholy, she had prescribed a continuous whirl of Weeks, and, to ensure the adequate administering of this drastic remedy, had constituted herself guide, philosopher, and friend, with the additional duties of chaperon and nurse thrown in. She was armed, she informed her charge, with powers of life and death, unquestionable authority, and unalterable affection.

Could it be, thought Phillis sometimes, as she watched

her small chaperon flitting feverishly from flirtation to flirtation, hurrying tirelessly from ball to ball, that she, too, might perhaps be seeking solace in the ceaseless, giddy whirl.

They had just arrived at the well-known military cantonment of Calore, a great racing centre which was *en fête* for the first spring meeting, and were looking forward, Mollie with eagerness, Phillis with apathy, to having for the next few days a superlatively festive time.

When this, the last burst of their frenzied gaiety, was over, and there remained to them only a kaleidoscope memory of crowded weeks, of grand receptions, stately functions, brilliant balls, they were to return to Ghazipur.

The cold weather was almost at an end, and in less than a month's time Phillis would be on her homeward way.

She had little to look forward to in the prospect, poor child, both her parents being obviously very much upset and annoyed—disappointed, they called it—at her unreasonable hesitation in accepting the eminently desirable Captain Stubbs. And when she told them—as she must now, now that she had grown wise, and had learnt to understand something of the meaning of the word love—that she could never, never accept him, that she would rather die than marry any one she did not care for, they would probably be very angry indeed.

The fact was they didn't want her at home. No one wanted her—no one except Captain Stubbs! *He* wanted her badly enough. Lately he had been following her about from place to place like her shadow, if

such a fat, rubicund being could possibly be called a shadow!

Wherever they went they were sure to find him, blatant but devoted, in his gorgeous, scarlet car, which, together with his hand and heart, were always, he persistently professed, at her disposal.

She was tired of it all; tired of the noise, the sun, the dust, the never-ending chatter, the publicity of the life they were leading. Wearied to death of the interminable race-meetings, each one an exact counterpart of the last; of the dances, all drearily alike; of the vapid conversation of her preternaturally uninteresting partners; of the importunities of impossible Stubby. She was sick of it—sick of it all, and especially sick of this wretched hat of hers, the limp feathers of which so obstinately refused to yield to the ministrations of the ivory paper-knife.

To her, in this black mood, entered pretty Mollie Curtis, bubbling over with mirth, dimpling with delight.

"I've just had a letter from 'A,'" rippled she, daintily swaying her lissom little body. "It came by the midday post."

"Oh," said Phillis in a lifeless tone, perfunctorily polite.

"A letter from 'A'—such a letter from 'A'!" sang the madcap, waving it about in the air, as she danced to and fro in freakish, fairy frolic, before poor Phillis, pensive by the window. "He has had an interview at last with Sir Peter. . . ."

Phillis looked up, instantly alert, and said breathlessly—

"With Sir Peter? And . . . and. . . . Oh, Mollie, tell me quick. . . ."

"And he nearly got kicked out," gurgled Mollie with evident enjoyment.

"Kicked out!" came a wail from the window. Phillis was white to the lips. "What . . . what . . .?"

"Sir Peter was furious," announced the mischievous little monkey, with provoking deliberation, "furious. . . ."

"Furious with Peter?" cried Phillis in agonised tones.

"No, not with Peter," said Mollie quickly. "Don't look like that, child. It's all right. Furious with 'A,' who says he never felt so like a whipped cur in all his life. He writes, 'It was bad enough in the old days when I was his subaltern and in for a . . . something,' screwing up her eyes, "'a wiggig,' that's it. . . ."

"But," broke in Phillis, letting hat and paper-knife fall unheeded to the floor, "I don't understand. Why was he furious with Major Anstruther?"

"Why, for daring to come, of course," laughed Mollie; "for daring to think it necessary to intercede with him on behalf of his 'beloved nephew'! Just listen to what the poor dear says," and she read aloud—

"The old man, transformed at my first words from a disconsolate widower into a raging lion, wanted to know if we looked upon him in the regiment as an unnatural monster! If we thought that just because he had got a son and heir of his own now, he wouldn't care a hang what became of Peter—his fine, gallant boy, worth all the rest of us put together! And so on by the yard, storming up and down the room, and shaking his fist in my face at intervals. Was the Army run by fools nowadays? he demanded. Hadn't they enough sense in their stupid heads to try

and keep a good man when they had got him? He would go to London at once. He would see some of these tuppenny-halfpenny bigwigs at the War Office and tell them what he thought of them. Evidently the Army was no longer a profession for gentlemen. It was certainly no longer fit for a nephew of his to serve in. The authorities would be pretty sure to try and climb down after he had given them a good slating. But it would be too late then. He didn't care a hang *what* they said; however humbly they apologised, the boy should go—should go at once! . . . I refrained from saying that it appeared highly probable the boy *would* go at once, since he had been cashiered! Poor old man, poor blustering old baby. He has aged a good deal during the last few months. I am sorry for him, and I am sorry for Peter, and I am sorry for myself for being so far away from your . . . 'um . . . um . . . um . . . ' said Mollie, folding up the letter, "that's nothing. There, Phillis dear," going over to her side and kissing her, "that's satisfactory, isn't it? Sir Peter is an old duck. It's all right about the money too—Peter's debts, you know. 'A' says the old boy has stumped up, and now won't rest until he has Peter safely at Croyston. So there's nothing more to worry about. Smile, child. Laugh. Sing."

But Phillis sat silent, the slow tears filling her great solemn eyes, and flowing down her pale cheeks.

At last she whispered piteously, with trembling lips—

"It's too late." Then, hopelessly, "We shall never see Peter again. He has disappeared—gone for ever.

I sometimes think he is dead," and she broke down completely.

All these weeks she had been struggling against the horrible feeling of black despair that clutched continually at her heart.

Daily, hourly almost, had she hoped to hear that some trace of Peter had been discovered. Major Denison, she knew, was doing everything that was possible, — was moving heaven and earth in his endeavours to find a clue to the whereabouts of the fugitive.

At first he had seemed so confident of being able, almost immediately, to get in touch with Peter through John Huckle, that she had allowed herself, to a certain extent, to be comforted—to be buoyed up with false hopes. But time went on, and no news came. Huckle would not answer letters. Even reply-paid telegrams met with no response. Major Denison affected to regard this as a hopeful sign. If John Huckle had nothing to conceal, he said, there would be no reason for his not answering letters; he would be as anxious as any one about Peter. But Phillis had come to the end of her small stock of hope, which, from being constantly deferred, had grown faint and feeble, making her heart sick; and now, despairing utterly, lay sobbing in uncontrollable grief.

Mollie, who, in spite of the fact that she always said she was no good at that sort of thing, was in reality sympathetic sweetness itself, took her in her arms, and with loving tenderness, whispered words of comfort.

Peter was going to be found at once, she assured her. Of course he was. Immediately. 'D'rectly minute!'

And then what a goose Phillis would feel . . . And she dried the poor child's tears.

And when he was found they would tell him the good news that Sir Peter was going to pay his debts; and that he was to live at Croyston and manage the place; and that it was no disgrace being cashiered—not a bit! and that Sir Peter thought he was quite right, and would have done the same himself, the old darling!

And then, lower still, so faintly, indeed, that Phillis could scarcely hear . . . that before very long this dear Peter who had been having such a hard time of it . . . and whom nobody could help loving . . . would come and carry off a certain little goose who, if she cried any more, would have red eyes and look a fright at the races that afternoon . . . and marry the silly little creature, and live happily with her at Croyston, for ever and ever, Amen.

It was a blushing, rosy Phillis who found courage to smile through her tears and whisper—

“How did you guess that I cared?”

“You dear, innocent baby,” was Mollie's laughing reply, “why, I've known it all along! So have we all. And that Peter cares too. Why, it's been as plain as plain.”

“But it's no use,” murmured Phillis mournfully, “my people would never allow it. . . .”

“Then they must be very silly people, my dear, if they are not content with a son-in-law like Peter. Why, judging from ‘A's’ accounts of how aged and broken the old man is, and how weak and delicate the little heir, it won't be very long before he is Sir Peter! Surely that prospect will tempt them!”

By such specious reasoning — ruthlessly sacrificing all Peter's relatives in a convenient holocaust — did artful Mollie win back the fugitive smile to Phillis's lips; successfully woo the vanished light of hope once more to her sad eyes.

Meanwhile to Peter at the other end of the station, the midday post had brought a great bundle of letters.

Denison, failing in all his attempts to get an answer from Huckle, had at last, in desperation, forwarded to his care a whole pile of the correspondence that had collected since the day on which the sentence of the Court Martial had been promulgated, with the curt request that it might be sent on to Mr Dare's address, 'unless it was thought likely that the profound secret of his hiding-place would thereby be endangered!'

John Huckle was, of course, perfectly ready to comply with this request. It was, indeed, entirely owing to Peter's emphatic and reiterated prohibitions that he had refrained from publishing from the housetops the name and designation of so distinguished an acquisition to his firm.

"No one don't get no information out of me, Master Peter, if them's your orders," he had promised.

And with implicit confidence in this assurance, feeling no apprehension whatever as to the safety of his secret — for when occasion demanded John could be as blankly unresponsive and as solidly unyielding as any block of granite,—Peter had left for Calore.

For some time, whilst the curtains of his little

room flapped noisily in the hot wind, and clouds of dust went hurtling past the door, he sat gazing listlessly at his packet of belated letters.

He felt in no great hurry to open them.

"From duns mostly," he surmised, looking at the belated letters.

Then, recognising his uncle's familiar scraggly writing, he laid down the rest of the bundle and, slowly turning over and over in his hand the thick envelope, whilst absently examining the postmarks, he allowed his thoughts to wander back over the past two months.

He had brought nothing but disgrace on this uncle who had always been so fond of him. Ruefully he pictured to himself what the contents of the letter would be. He wondered how the old man would take it. No one prided himself more than Sir Peter, he knew, on his plain speaking. He would probably find scathing sarcasm, bitter reproaches, insults even. He pulled himself together; this hesitation on his part, he told himself, was ridiculous—cowardly. Without further ado he tore open the letter.

Hastily he scanned the shaky lines that were so difficult to decipher; anxiously he tried to gather the sense of what he read. 'I'm devilish glad you knocked the brute down,' were the first words he made out. He could scarcely believe his senses. A warm glow permeated his whole being. The blood tingled in his veins. He found that his eyes were wet.

He was not to be hauled over the coals, then, after all! His uncle, dear old boy, sided with him

against the enemy; backed him up blindly in his insubordination.

Wonderful!

His heart leapt at the thought.

In the sudden revulsion of feeling his spirits mounted skywards. He laughed aloud.

Curiously enough he felt as though he had been through it all before. Where? Where had he previously experienced this soaring feeling of sudden unexpected relief, as if some heavy burden had been lifted from his soul?

In a flash he remembered.

He was back in dreary Ladysmith once more, besieged, hungry, impotent, sharing with the rest of the garrison the exasperating belief that the whole of the British nation would be looking upon them as little better than idiots for letting themselves be shut up in a trap, when suddenly, without any warning, there had reached them—from one of the townspeople who had escaped through the besiegers' lines disguised as a Kaffir—the following laconic but vastly cheering message, 'You are not fools, but heroes!'

He laughed again blithely at the recollection, then set himself to the agreeable task of deciphering this strangely similar message he had just received.

His uncle had written under the influence of very strong emotion, and the crabbed writing was in many places quite illegible; but the meaning was plain enough—he was not a fool but a hero.

Not a fool . . . nor a knave . . . nor an unlicked cub . . . nor an undisciplined puppy . . . nor any of the hundred and one things he had expected his uncle to call him—but a hero, nothing less!

"You are wanted badly here," the old man wrote, "to look after the place. I'm sick of these infernal agents. Since Wilson died I've had no less than four of them, each one worse than the last. So you must come and lend a hand. We can't get on without you any longer. I am counting on you to keep an eye on the youngster, too—to see that he grows up a straight clean-living gentleman who don't funk his fences. I know I can trust you, my boy, and if you will undertake this responsibility you will be doing a great kindness to an old man who has one foot in the grave. Young Anstruther of the regiment was down here last week. I've arranged with him to make some payments on your behalf. He talks too much. I enclose a cheque for your passage. The army may whistle for your services now. Kindly telegraph date on which you will reach Croyston."

Dazed by this sudden turn of Fortune's wheel, Peter sat motionless for a while, his head resting on his hands.

Could he possibly go back to Croyston at once—just as if nothing had happened? Could his uncle really be ready to forgive and forget like this?—to condone his offences in this marvellous manner? Or was this unlooked-for clemency, this unheard-of generosity on the part of the old man, only the outcome of his frenzied indignation against the unspeakable Authorities—just a passing whim—visionary—impracticable?

After all, there was no getting over the fact that he had been cashiered, that he was disgraced.

What would the people in the county think about it? Probably they would turn their backs upon him. *That* would be pleasant!

Could he go? Ought he to go? Dared he face it?

It is impossible to say on what course of action Peter would eventually have decided, had not a letter from Denison, which he opened next, materially assisted him in the difficult task of making up his mind.

"I am quite sure you won't hesitate another moment about going back to Croyston," he read, "when I tell you what 'A.' says about your people there. He writes, 'Dare must come home at once. Let him know it's quite on the cards that the youngster at Croyston may snuff out at any moment, in which case, if old Sir Peter's left all alone with no one belonging to him, the Pill says he won't answer for his life or reason. . . .' So you see you've no choice in the matter. It won't be easy just at first, perhaps, but I know you are not the sort of chap to shirk anything that is so obviously your duty. So go along and good luck go with you. They were drinking your health, I hear, till all hours in the Mess last guest-night—much to the Colonel's annoyance. If that's how your regiment feels about you, I don't think there's much need for you to worry about disgrace and dishonour and suchlike dam nonsense. And the next thing I hope to hear about you is that you have fixed it up with that charming Miss Phillis to get married and live happily ever after. How the gods are showering good gifts upon you! I wish I were in your shoes. Now that you and old 'A.' are gone, I find this place intolerable, so I am trying for an exchange into the home battalion. I think it can be arranged all right, so it will probably not be very long before you see me again. I am counting on getting an invitation to Croyston to help you shoot

your pheasants, and, if pressed, I might even stretch a point and consent to be your best man. What do you say to that?"

Peter's heart was very full.

How good they all were to him! He was not to be cast off after all, then; not to be deserted as he had imagined. His friends only seemed to be anxious to stand by him in his troubles, to make things easy for him, to prove to him that no one thought any the worse of him for what he had done. Denison, Anstruther, his dear peppery old uncle, loyal John Huckle, his brother officers, all wishing him well, all helping to give him back his self-respect; making it possible for him to hold up his head once more.

And Phillis? What did she think?

Would he some day be able to go to her, as Denison seemed to think, and tell her that he loved her? Or must he always look upon himself as an outcast—beyond the pale?

There was no time now for such thoughts. He must get home—home to Croyston—at once, and see how things were before he said anything to her. Dear little Phil! If she really cared . . . perhaps . . . but there, the first thing he had to do was to see about getting out of India as quickly as possible. The mail-boat would be leaving Bombay on Saturday. Could he catch it?

He rummaged through his bag for a time-table. As good luck would have it the train that left Calore at seven that evening was timed to catch Saturday's steamer.

He hurriedly wrote and despatched several telegrams. Then suddenly the sight of a clock brought

him back to his surroundings, reminded him of the duties of his new position, which, owing to the excitement of the last hour, he had completely forgotten.

A quarter to two! And he had to take Stubby to the races at two! Should he do it? . . . He needn't be a chauffeur now any longer unless he chose. But perhaps he oughtn't to throw the little bouncer over at the last moment like that without a word of warning. . . . It wouldn't be quite playing the game. Besides, he had nothing else to do, no packing. His modest possessions were all in his bag, ready for the road. He *would* do it—he would be a real chauffeur for once, he decided. It would be rather a rag!

There was not a moment to be lost though, if he wanted to be in time; so slipping into the grotesque disguise of his motor-kit, he then and there got out the big car, and sent her along to such purpose that at the appointed hour he was at the Mess, ready to take his ineffable employer, together with a goodly batch of the Blue Lancer contingent, to the race-course.

A merry party it was that came laughing out from lunch, tumbling over one another into the roomy tonneau of the great scarlet car, and overflowing not only on to the seat beside Peter, which accommodated two, but also on to the very step whereon still another beaming young cavalryman precariously balanced himself.

"Right behind," shouted this self-appointed 'conductor,' slamming the door with a shrill whistle of the cat-call order; and away went the frightful, flaring, muttering motor with its hilarious load.

Peter was glad of his disguise, since he recognised

in one of the occupants of the front seat beside him the dreadful little Jew-boy of the 20th Dragoon Guards who had promised him such a big price for Lucifer.

Sucking away at an enormous cigar, the little wretch was laying down the law on the subject of "Horthie-breedin' in England," to his companion, a fair, sleepy, unintellectual-looking young Lancer, who every now and again would say "Oh," politely, and then relapse into dreamy silence.

Turning round in answer to some question put to him from the tonneau, the Jew-boy was greeted with a facetious cry of—

"Noses outside, Ike; no room for that great bulbous beak of yours, in here!"

This precious gem of Hooligan humour which fell so graciously from the lips of his blatant brother-officer, Stubbs—the only other representative present of that tawdry travesty of a regiment, The Trades Union Dragoon Guards—seemed to be taken in quite good part by the impossible Israelite, such witticisms being typical of the tone of their degenerate corps, in which noisy vulgarity did duty for good manners, and barbarous ostentation for good taste.

The sparkling sally called forth a perfunctory smile of civility from the Lancers, who could not help congratulating themselves secretly in their well-bred souls, that hitherto they had not been called upon to tolerate amongst their exclusive numbers any of these undesirable specimens of the Plutonic Plutocracy.

"Oh, Phillis, what a 'bominable day," moaned Mollie Curtis, in a woe-begone tone of distress as, amidst

gusty clouds of whirling dust, they drove up to the crowded racecourse. "Your irrepressible cavalier is here before you," she added mischievously; "see his gigantic car stopping the way!" and she pointed, with a small indignant hand, to where Captain Stubbs's magnificent motor throbbed and trembled at the roadside.

As they looked towards it the chauffeur, who had taken off his cap and goggles, and was now standing flicking the dust from his face and hair with a handkerchief, turned round.

It was Peter!

Phillis involuntarily uttered an ecstatic cry of astonishment, and Mollie, leaning out of the window of the carriage, frantically waved her parasol to attract his attention.

But he did not see her, and climbing into his seat, steered the vermilion monster slowly through the crowd of vehicles to an open space under some trees apart from the rest.

"We've lost him," said Phillis tearfully. "Oh, Mollie, to think of Peter's being a chauffeur! Isn't it dreadful!"

"Nonsense, child, it's not dreadful at all," was the vivacious reply. "I think it's splendid of him setting to work immediately like that. Would you rather have had him hanging about doing nothing, I should like to know, and perhaps borrowing money to live on, and altogether going to the bad? You ought to be proud of him, you silly little Philly!"

"So I am, of course," cried Phillis indignantly. "But, *poor* boy, fancy his having to be a servant . . . a . . . an . . ."

“Hireling’s the word you’re looking for, isn’t it, my melodramatic duck? Perhaps that’s why he fleeth—because he is an hireling. Now, then, after him you go. No time to dry your eyes. We must take jolly good care not to let him slip through our fingers again. And when you have found him over there under the trees, you must just go up to him and seize hold of him if he tried to escape, and insist upon his coming back with you. Say you will expose him as an impostor if he doesn’t. And then tell him all about poor old Sir Peter, and everything. And, if I were you, I should propose to him right out! There, you needn’t look so shocked child,” as poor Phillis, the picture of embarrassed distress, protested appealingly. “You know quite well he has been in love with you for ages; but he’ll never speak unless you make him—mark my words. He’s sure to be brim full of conscientious scruples, poor darling boy, about marrying you, and dragging you down, and all that sort of nonsense. So you’ll just have to say you simply can’t and won’t live without him. Tell him too, of the horrible—the ghastly—the excruciating—alternative that lies before you—Stubby! *That* ought to bring him to his senses if nothing else will;” and she bustled blushing Phillis off in quest of the scarlet car, calling after her, “Meet me here in half an hour’s time; I shan’t be able to cope with your devoted dragoon for longer than that, and—don’t come back alone!”

With cheeks aflame at Mollie’s audacious advice, Phillis, in eager tremulous haste threaded her hurried way through the strange medley of traffic, where smart European carriages, jingling ekkas, and queer country carts jostled one another in vociferous confusion; and

at length reached in safety the great red car, hideous with its vivid colour and flashing fittings — garish emblem of its owner's wealth.

To her excited imagination it seemed almost as though the scarlet monster were grinning at her menacingly; and she shivered as she thought of the fate that might be in store for her if 'sudden Perseus,' in the guise of a chauffeur, could not be induced to come to her rescue.

Trembling she hesitated. How could she be sure that he cared? . . . Mollie was such a madcap . . .

Another moment and her doubts were for ever set at rest. 'Sudden Perseus,' with a great glad cry of amazement, had seized both her hands in his, and was looking down at her, his eyes full of hungry, fervent, adoring love.

"Phillis!"

"Peter!"

Their souls were in their names.

Oblivious of all mundane matters, of the gesticulating crowds of natives, of the tumultuous excited turmoil of the racecourse, of the tingling heat, the blinding dust, they stood gazing at one another.

At last Peter forced himself to break the silence.

"Get in here," he said unsteadily, helping her into the car.

Then, when they found themselves, after so many weary weeks alone together once more, serenely sequestered side by side, far from the madding crowd, a great glorious wave of happiness came flooding in upon their souls, sweeping away all doubts and fears and difficulties and dangers, and drowning despair in its delicious depths.

Phillis, the tears still shining on her long lashes, her hands still locked close in his, began timidly to scold him, to utter little tender reproaches.

Why had he gone away without a word? . . . Why had he never answered her letters? . . . Why had he not trusted her? . . . Surely he must have known that she would always be the same to him, whatever happened. . . . Oh, he was unkind . . . unkind. And now he was going about disguised for fear that she or some of his friends might recognise him.

Her tears began to flow afresh.

"Well, I'm not going to be a chauffeur any longer, dear," he told her gently. "I am going home.

"What, to Croyston? Then, you've heard? . . ."

He nodded.

"Yes. I start to-night."

"To-night," she cried aghast. "Oh, not to-night Peter!"

"I must. My uncle's health's failing and he needs me. Unless I start to-night, I shan't catch the next boat."

There was silence,

He was looking at her longingly, with wistful eyes; then slowly, resolutely, he turned away his head.

Phillis could have screamed.

These wretched scruples of his were going to part them after all. . . . He would go away and leave her defenceless; at the mercy of a perverse fate that, with humiliating irony, seemed to be bent upon driving her into the arms of the very man with whose chauffeur she was in love!

She was desperate. Here was this dear brave boy who loved her, whose manifest love showed itself

clearly in every line of his thin worn face, in his every word and look and gesture, prevented—as Mollie had foretold—by some absurd scruple or another from telling her of his love.

As if any woman wouldn't be proud of such a lover. . . .

What could she do? What *could* she do?

Madcap Mollie's parting words haunted her. 'Propose to him yourself,' had been the little witch's impish council. Propose to him! Impossible. How could she do such a thing! She was in despair. But, piteous as poor Phillis's perplexity undoubtedly was, her lover's plight was even more gratuitously heartrending.

With the first knowledge that she was in Calore, jealousy, mercilessly cruel, had seized upon him, tearing at his resolutions, ruthlessly striving to overcome his scruples; to shake the stern decision to which he had so painfully come, that it would not be right or fair or honourable to say anything as yet of his love.

What did Phillis's presence in the same station as the unutterable Stubbs portend?

That she was going to marry him? Perhaps. Oh, horror! Possibly they were already engaged!

Stubbs was in love with her . . . Had been in love with her for ever so long . . . He was rich . . . It was a good match for her . . . And the name he would be able to give her was at any rate an unblemished one, even though it was so commonplace and frightful.

He felt he could bear the suspense no longer. He must know the worst at once.

With quaking heart he asked what were her plans; what was she going to do?

"Do," she said blankly. "I don't know."

He breathed again.

"Then you are not engaged—engaged to be married, I mean—to Captain Stubbs?"

This was her opportunity.

"No," she answered; "n-no, not yet . . ."

"Not yet," he repeated. "Oh, Phil, surely you are never going to marry the fella? . . ."

"Perhaps . . . perhaps I shall have to, Peter. My people want me to . . . and . . . and . . ."

"But you don't love him, Phil?"

At this she lifted great pathetic eyes, and faltered—

"No, no. Oh no, Peter."

So forlorn and miserable did she look that, in a sudden paroxysm of protective pity, he put both his arms about her, gathering her close.

"Then you can't marry him. That settles it!"

"But . . . but . . . I shall *have* to," she whispered, her blue eyes misty with tremulous tears. "Unless . . ." and an expression of plaintive hope—of fugitive mischief, almost—flitted across her flower-like face which now, under the sun of his adoring gaze, blossomed into a happy, trustful, triumphant smile, "unless somebody else . . . asks me . . . Peter . . ." Their lips met.

THE END.

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